VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

AUGUST 1996 ONE DOLLAR

Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr.

What's New For the Upcoming Season

August finds us only a month away from the beginning of this year's hunting seasons. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has been working on some things to help you get ready for these upcoming shooting sports, and we'd like to tell you about them.

This year's hunting regulations have been printed in a more user-friendly format, an easy-to-use booklet. We believe that this booklet will make it easier to navigate through the various hunting seasons. Its 64 pages describe the wide variety of hunting opportunities that we have here in Virginia. We strongly suggest that everyone going afield have a copy of this booklet. The quail on the cover will make them easy to spot at your local license agent.

We have also assembled *A Guide to Virginia's Wildlife Management Areas*. It's a marvelous book that provides information and maps for all 33 of the Department's wildlife management areas. You will find out how to get to each area, learn about the hunting and fishing possibilities, and discover wonderful opportunities for wildlife watching and photography.

The hunting license that you will buy this year, and it's on sale now, is a little different from last year's license. All of the information that was previously on the license and its carrier is now on the license itself. The carrier that we have used since 1992 is no longer necessary, but will still be available if you wish to use it.

We also will be getting ready for the upcoming hunting seasons through the Department's participation in the Virginia Outdoor Sportsman Show. Department biologists and law enforcement officers will be involved in the show's seminars, and we are planning to have the interactive video from our Hunter Education program on hand to test and teach hunting skills. There will be other events at the show as well, but we are looking forward to our role. The show will be held at The Showplace in Mechanicsville on August 9, 10, and 11.

We realize there is a risk in repeating some things too many times, but other messages can never be said enough. Safety is one of these things that can always bear repeating. We all know just how hot it is in Virginia in August; but as we boat and fish this month we encourage everyone to wear personal flotation devices. Even though it can be warmer with one on, you should remember the slogan "Life jackets. They float. You don't." It's also a very good idea to pay attention to the regulations that apply to the area you are fishing. Virginia's fishing rules are pretty easy to understand, fishing licenses are inexpensive and most creel limits are very generous. We certainly hope everyone will fish by the rules and not have the day spoiled by getting a summons from one of our game wardens.

Lee Walker

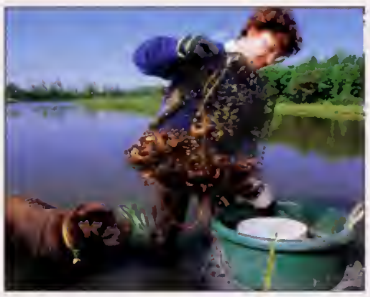
One more note on hunting. We're only a very few weeks away from the resident goose hunting season which will begin in September. Now's the time to start getting ready for what is becoming a popular and challenging hunting season. Along with doves, it makes September a busy hunting month. A good way to get ready for the action would be to take a hunter education course; whether the course is a first for you or a refresher, it's a great way to begin the season.

We wish everyone safe and happy hunting.

Harry Lloyd Gillam
1933-1996

Virginia Wildlife has had several editors and the Department has given the job of directing public information and education to numerous people over its 80 years. Many of these people went on to bigger and better jobs and some even gained a measure of prominence. Harry Gillam stayed the course, giving most of his working career to the sportsmen of Virginia. In the 29 years he worked for the Department, he amassed a volume of work that is unprecedented to this day. This magazine is but one example. Under his direction it went from a drab undistinguished fish and game magazine to the colorful award winning publication it is today. Harry will be missed by the Department and the thousands of sportsmen that he affected so positively.

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE



Cover: Jake, black lab pup owned by Neil Selby.
Photo by ©Dwight Dyke
Back cover: *Illustration by Norman Rainock*

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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

VOLUME 57 NUMBER 8

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K-9 Coach

by Colston Newton
Photographs by Dwight Dyke

From pointers to wire hairs to Irish water spaniels, Neil Selby uses a dog's natural ability to turn it into a hunting dog

Big rangy pointers, little docile Brittanies, setters, wire hairs, short hairs, Labradors, even Nova Scotia duck tolling dogs and Irish water spaniels—they all have one thing in common at Neil Selby's Shady Grove Kennels near Remington. They all yap happily and bound to the front of their pens to greet Selby when he comes into the diary barn he has converted into spacious accommodations for as many as 30 dogs.

It's not surprising. Selby's constant refrain when he talks about training gun dogs is that the dog has to have fun as it's trained or it isn't going to learn much.

Take "blinkers," for example, bird dogs that deliberately walk away from a covey of quail pretending they haven't spotted them. Usually they have been mishandled as young dogs and associate hunting with punishment, according to Selby.

What's happened, he says, is that as pups, the dogs do what comes naturally and find birds. Then they do what also comes naturally—first they point and then they jump at the birds and try to catch them whereupon their owner berates and beats them for not holding the point.

Above: *Selby trains Jessie, a German shorthair pointer owned by John Laughlin, to give up the bird on command.*

"It gets to where the dog sees birds and thinks 'Uh oh. I'm not getting another licking,' and walks off," Selby says. Until the instinct to point has been reinforced, the dog hasn't any idea what it's done wrong and just decides to stay out of the sort of situation that got it in trouble.

Selby will train any hunting dog and once successfully trained a nine-year-old pointer that had been bumping quail all its life. He says it's best, however, to bring dogs to him when they are about four months old and haven't been taught anything but their name.

Before Selby does anything with a newly arrived dog, he lets it have a week to get used to living in the kennel and then he starts figuring out if the dog will make a pointer, a retriever or, as is becoming more common, both.

"All dogs are individuals," he says. "First, you have to see if the particular dog has the ability to hunt. Some of them have the ability but not the desire. All we do is take the dog's natural ability and develop it."

Dogs of moderate intelligence, senses of smell and eyesight can be worked with, Selby says, but you can't do anything with a dog that just plain doesn't want to hunt. Sometimes that is a hard truth to swallow for an owner who has paid a great deal of money for a dog with good bloodlines.

The first lesson for any dog Selby works with is to stop when given the command "whoa." For anybody who has been frustrated trying to teach old Fido to "stay," watching

Selby work with a new dog is a revelation.

The dog is brought to Selby's training table, an elevated runway about 50 feet long and about a yard wide. A cable suspended a couple of feet above the runway's carpeted surface has a wire hanging from a pulley. The wire can be attached to a dog's collar which keeps the dog from leaving the table but allows it to move back and forth along its length.

"It's a great training device," Selby says of the table. "It gives the trainer complete control without hurting the dog."

Once up on the table, an untrained dog will try to do what is natural—move around as it sees fit. Selby simply quietly says "whoa" and tightens down firmly but not harshly on the dog's collar until it gets the idea that it's supposed to stop when it hears "whoa."

It doesn't take most dogs long to figure out what they're supposed to do, according to Selby. But, "they're just like children and will always try to take advantage" so lessons have to be reinforced by repetition and "a firm hand," he says.

But a firm hand doesn't mean loud or prolonged lessons. "Most people tend to over-handle and the dog gets bored," he observed. "The dog has to be having fun" if it's going to be a good gun dog, he insists.

The training table is also where Selby teaches the dogs to follow hand signals once he has taught them to fetch a training dummy to him.

The table has a metal pole at each end so that when a dog is positioned next to one of them, it can only turn one direction, since the other direction is blocked by the pole. Unseen by the dog, Selby places a training dummy at the far end of the table, places the dog next to the other pole facing away from the dummy and then, saying "fetch," waves this arm in the direction he knows the dog will have to turn. The dog quickly comes to understand that if it moves the direction the arm indicates, it will find the dummy.

In the field, hand signals allow handlers to direct retrievers to downed waterfowl they can't see and to control bird dogs even when they are at a distance.

When Selby takes bird dogs to the field for their first lessons, he has them on a long rope, called a check cord, that he uses to direct the dog as he teaches it to "quarter," to cover a complete area before moving on.

Later, when the dog has advanced in its learning, Selby drops the cord but will pick it up when the dog shows signs of not recalling how to cover an area properly.

Selby trains the bird dogs in his charge in the cool hours when scent-

Rio, English Pointer. Owner Gene Grimsley.

Tule Bog, Irish Water Spaniel
Owner Mary Ruth Calhoun

ing conditions are good and in tall grass where his assistants have hidden pen-raised quail so that the dog invariably smells the birds before seeing them.

Selby trains the dogs to use their noses because a dog that relies on its eyes rather than its nose isn't of much use in heavy cover.

When a bird dog hunting full tilt with its nose gets a double nostril blast of bird scent, it will throw on the brakes so hard that it will almost flip itself over with pure momentum. That's when Selby says "whoa" and the dog stays put, pointing, rather than jumping the bird.

Quietly repeating "whoa," Selby then approaches the dog and, if need be, gently adjusts its body into a classic stance before touching its ear, the signal to retrieve, which releases the dog from its point.

Selby trains dogs to hunt all types of game birds and adjusts the training to match the sort of hunting the dog will be used for, but it's all basically the same, he says.

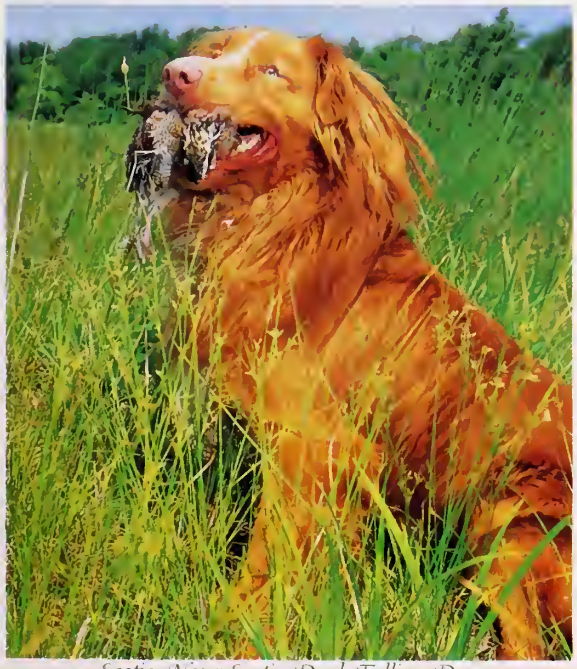
Selby isn't a bragging man, and he can prove his assertion by having the Nova Scotia duck tolling dog in his charge, a pure bred-to-the-water dog if there ever was one, point quail as neatly as any pointer or setter would.

His assertion is also backed by his having won a pheasant field trial championship with a Labrador retriever, a type dog not generally associated with upland hunting. Once that bit of information comes out, Selby can't resist chuckling. "I won runner-up with a pointing dog. They didn't care much for that."

Selby's operation encompasses 540 acres managed to provide the sort of landscape the dogs will encounter when they are taken hunting or to field trials.

Suzy, German Shorthair Pointer. Owner Neil Selby.

My Dog, Yellow Lab. Owner Terry Emanuel.



Scotie, Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Dog
Owner Dr. John Jenks

Page 6: *As part of her training, Jenny, a black lab owned by Ronnie Andrews learns to hold a bumper.*
The next step is to train Jenny to follow hand signals.
Above right: *Penny, a Brittany spaniel owned by Tony Sakowski is encouraged to be staunch on point.*
Selby works the dogs in the cool hours of the day when scenting conditions are good.

There is a lake where the water dogs are taught to retrieve. Fields are left in tall grass and bounded by hedgerows so that bird dogs will have to smell their quarry rather than sight hunt it.

The acreage has other uses—a sporting clays course and hunting. Selby conducts guided hunts for everything from quail and ducks to chukar at Shady Grove. In September, he has a major dove hunt followed by a barbecue and barn dance.

And sportsmen can hunt any way they like. They can traipse along on foot or Selby can hitch up his mule-drawn gunning buggy and let them hunt in classic, Deep South plantation style.

A second wagon is equipped to provide handicapped hunters access to the field.

Although Selby will provide sportsmen with a guide and dogs, he likes it when the owners of dogs he has trained use his facilities so he can be sure that the owners understand how to handle their dogs once he sends them home. A dog that has completed its initial training is "broke" but not finished. It's a lot easier on Selby if, when the dog comes back for a refresher course, he doesn't have to start all over again or, worse, unteach bad habits.

Additionally, wild quail, for example, have become harder to find and the only way to really "make" a gun dog is to shoot a lot of game over it so it truly learns its trade. By using Selby's preserve, owners can not only learn how to handle their dogs, but can give their dogs more actual experience than most are likely to get anywhere else.

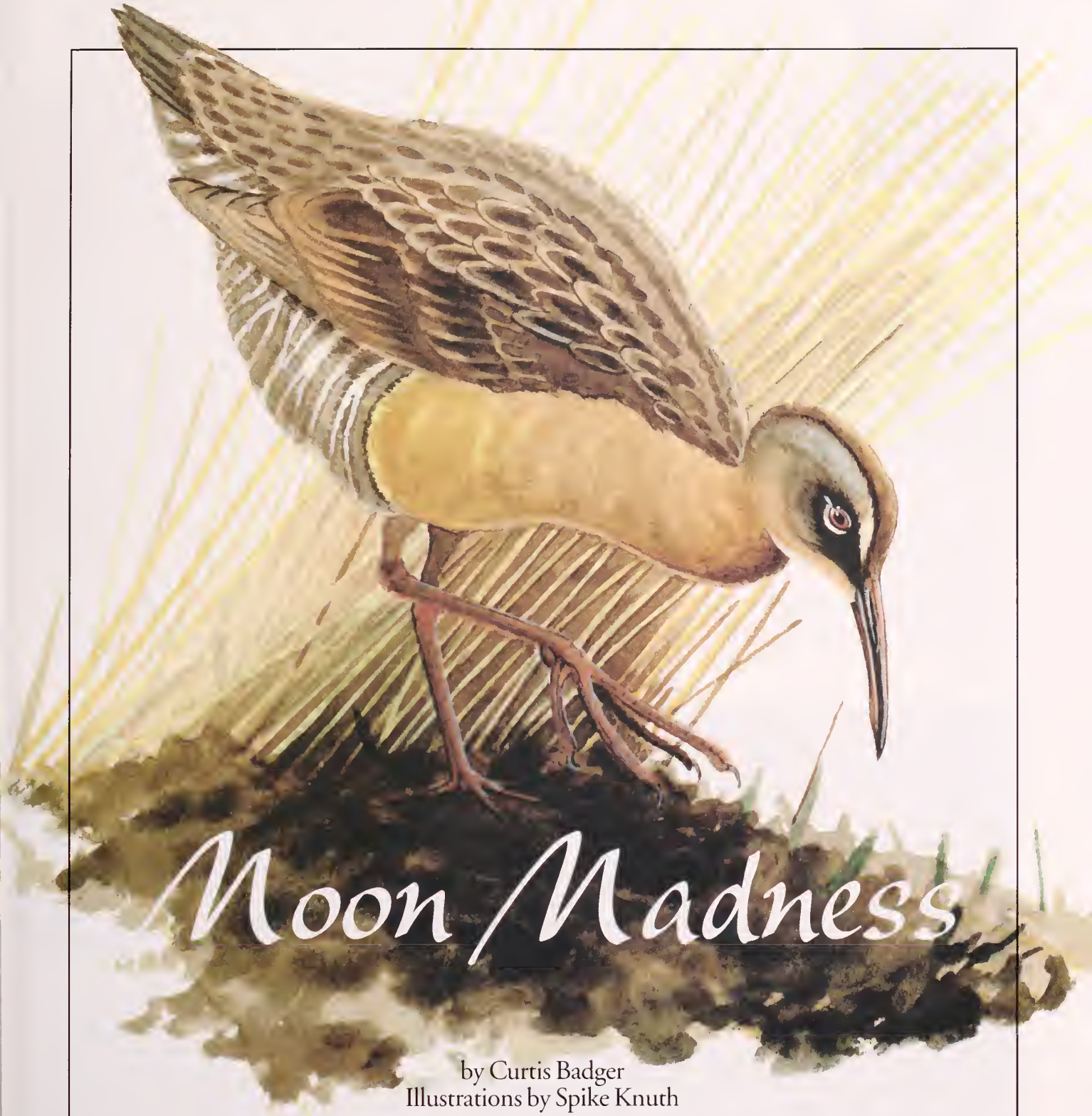
There's probably another reason Selby likes to see the owners of the dogs he trains use his preserve—it lets him see the dogs. He spent 13 years working with an older trainer for free to learn his trade because the dogs "just fascinate" him. Watching him with his canine pupils, it's pretty clear that here is more than fascination at work, there's affection for every dog he handles. □

Colston Newton is a senior writer for the Northumberland Echo *in Heathsville, VA. He covers all aspects of country life including hunting and fishing.*

Ben, German Shorthair Pointer
Owner Gene Grimsley

Buck, English Setter
Owner Jeff Kaufman

Jeb, Chocolate Lab. Owner Wesley Werling.



Moon Madness

by Curtis Badger
Illustrations by Spike Knuth

The fall lunar tides stir thoughts of rail hunting.

Years ago I had a friend who would never plan a hunting or fishing trip without first consulting the Solunar Tables, those day-by-day forecasts that have for many years been published in the monthly outdoor magazines. My fishing and hunting trips were seldom determined by the position of the moon and stars in those days, they usually were governed by more pragmatic considerations, such as whether I could get a day off work.

For one type of hunt, though, I fully rely on the latest information on moon phase, atmospheric conditions, prevailing winds, and the alignment of the planets. I'm speaking, of course, of rail hunts, those infrequent gifts of moon phase and planetary alignment, where success is more often determined by astronomy rather than one's ability with a shotgun.

For the uninitiated, the lunar phase is important in rail hunting because at certain moon cycles tides are pushed higher than normal, covering the cordgrass meadows along the coast where rails live. The gravitational pull of the moon and sun determine the pulse of tides on earth, with the highest and lowest tides coming during cycles when the gravitational pull is the strongest, such as at full moon.

Most of the time, these grassy wetlands are well above the high water mark, and the rails have thousands of acres of thick grass in which to hide. But during the monthly high lunar tides, when the water may be more than a foot above normal high tide, all but the highest stands of grass are covered, thus reducing the rails' ability to hide and increasing your chances of having your friends over for a rail dinner.

Virginia has numerous species of rails. The king is a large freshwater bird, and the Virginia rail is similar, but smaller. The yellow rail and black rail are small, secretive, and rare birds not often found in the deepwater marshes of the coast. When we speak of rail hunting, we refer instead to the clapper rail *(Rallus longirontris)*, a large, long-legged rail common to the salt marshes of the seaside.

Clapper rails are readily found in the extensive marshes that separate the Virginia barrier islands from the mainland Eastern Shore. Indeed, one of the prime clapper rail territories in the state is Mockhorn Island Wildlife Management Area in Northampton County near the village of Oyster. Mockhorn is a long, finger shaped inner island—lying between the mainland and the barrier beaches—and it primarily is a vast cordgrass meadow, which is prime clapper rail habitat. The only high land of any significance is on the southern portion of the island, where there are the remains of an old hunting lodge, complete with a

concrete wall to protect the buildings from storm tides.

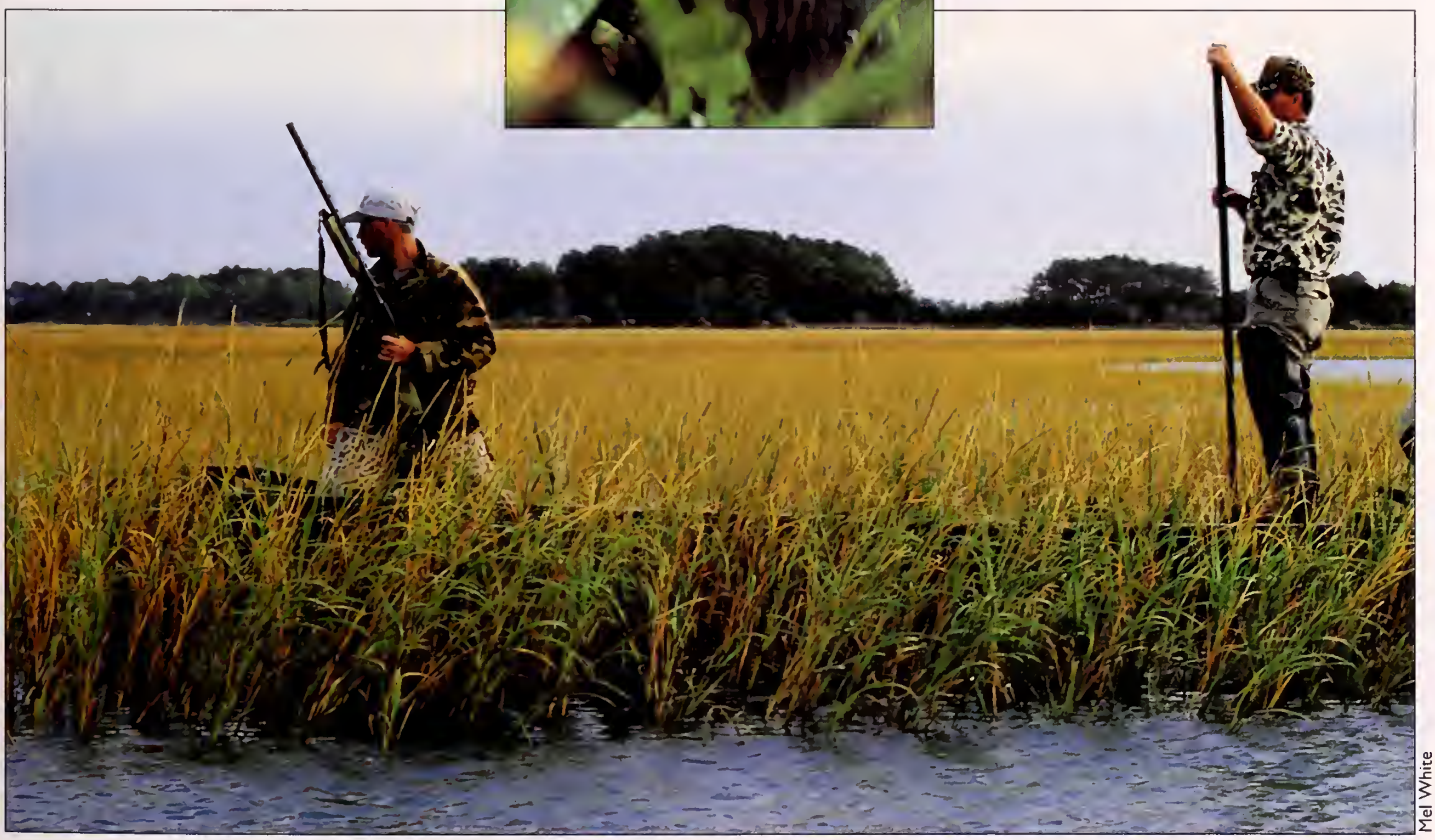
Clapper rails can be found in the southern Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, but the birds seem to prefer the saltier environs of the seaside, probably because their favorite foods—mud snails, periwinkles, fiddler crabs, and the like—are so abundant there.

Where I live on Virginia's Eastern Shore, clapper rails are more commonly known as marsh hens, or sage hens. When the alignment of the moon, sun, and earth produces a cyclical high tide during the fall rail season, it is called a marsh henning tide. It is a gift of nature not to be taken lightly. My father, when I was young and just learning to hunt, would take me out of school for a half-day during marsh henning tides. My father valued education highly and served on our local school board for 20 years, but he realized that marsh henning tides were not to be squandered; I could make up a spelling test at a later date.

I learned to hunt in the salt marshes of the seaside, poling a little skiff over temporarily flooded meadows of cordgrass. It was a similar experience, I suppose, that boys in the Valley or the Highlands might have had hunting squirrels or rabbits, a form of initiation. The only difference was that I had to learn to read the tide tables, and I usually came home soaking wet.

My father introduced me to hunting through the clapper rail for a number of reasons. They are numerous in their particular habitat; the bag limit is fifteen per day. Rails are not explosive flyers like bobwhite or woodcock, and a flooded salt marsh offers precious little in the way of cover that might confuse a novice

(Left) A ready shotgun may not be enough as these birds are notorious for sneaking away through the marsh. (Below) Polling the boat is necessary as hunting under power is illegal. (Right) Clapper rail photo by Joe McDonald.



Mel White

shotgunner. So, if the moon is kind, the chances for success are good, and a dinner of crisply fried marsh hens is an appropriate reward.

These conditions make rail hunting not only a good sport for young hunters, but for novices of any age. Even for experienced hunters, rail hunting provides an early-fall opportunity to hone shooting skills, a nice break from the sporting clays range. Plus, rails provide a unique hunting opportunity: a flooding tide, a vast salt marsh, and a chance to take a bird described in the field guides as "more often heard than seen."

To go rail hunting you need a small boat, a push-pole, a shotgun in the 12- to 20-gauge range, plenty of low-brass number 6 or 8 shells, and, of course, your state hunting license. Rails are migratory within their range but are not considered migratory waterfowl, so a federal duck stamp is not required, nor is steel shot

Rail hunting is at its best a two-person sport. A hunt will last two to three hours, running from the very end of flood tide through slack water to the beginning of ebb tide. One person poles the boat half the time, while the other takes the bow seat as the shooter. At about half way through the hunt, the positions are switched.

The poler, who is standing, serves as a lookout, spotting birds in the grassy clumps for the shooter, who, for safety's sake, usually sits or kneels. It also is a safety consideration that both hunters do not shoot at the same time.

A good rail hunting boat is small, light, and easily poled through emerging cordgrass. When rail hunting—and boat building—were more commonly practiced on the coast early in this century, skilled craftsmen made boats especially for rail hunting. A typical marsh henning boat was narrow, as stable as it could be made under the circumstances, sharp of bow, and with a slight rise in her stern so that the weight of the poler would lift the bow slightly and make the passage through cordgrass easier. Most were made of white cedar.

Modern rail boats usually are compromises, ranging from small johnboats to canoes to fiberglass skiffs. A canoe has the requisite sharp bow but can be tippy when one person is poling and the other attempting to shoot. The johnboat is stable, but the blunt bow makes negotiating the grasses more difficult. A sharp-bowed fishing boat of 13 to 14 feet probably comes closest to the classic marsh henning skiff. A friend recently bought a fiberglass version of a classic Louisiana pirogue, and he says it's a marsh henning boat of the first order.

Curtis Badger

Susan M. Glascock

(Top) Good hunting can be found on the VDGIF wildlife management area at Mockhorn Island. (Above) This tidal creek and salt marsh on Virginia's Eastern Shore is prime habitat for clapper rail.

No matter what kind of boat you use, if it is fitted with an outboard motor, make sure the motor is tilted and the boat not under motor propulsion before you shoot. To do otherwise will put you at risk of a large fine. Plus, shooting rails under motor power isn't exactly sporting.

Lacking a proper marsh henning boat, you have two choices: You can hire a guide to take you out, or you can walk the marshy islands called hammocks and try to flush rails from the groundsel and cedar thickets that make up these little highlands. Still, you will probably need a boat to get out to the hammocks.

In the first half of this century, many of the fishing guides and their mates supplemented their income by taking out rail hunters in the fall, which was a way to bridge the more lucrative fishing and waterfowl seasons. Today, however, some of the best fishing on the coast is done in the fall, and few charter skippers are interested in exchanging a day in the captain's chair for a skiff and a push pole.

Still, it is possible to arrange a trip. A few inquiries at seaside marinas will usually turn up a college student in need of a few extra bucks, a waterman between seasons, or a veteran marsh henner who is willing to take out an interested hunter for old times sake.

High tides can be caused by a number of things, including offshore storms, wind direction, and atmospheric conditions. But the most predictable forecaster of tides is the annual book of tide tables published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). A single hefty book includes all the tidal information for the east coast of North and South America for a calendar year.

While tide information can be found in various places, from newspapers to weather forecasts on radio and TV, you need to know more than just the time of high tide. You need to know how high the tide is going to be, and this is what the NOAA guide tells you.

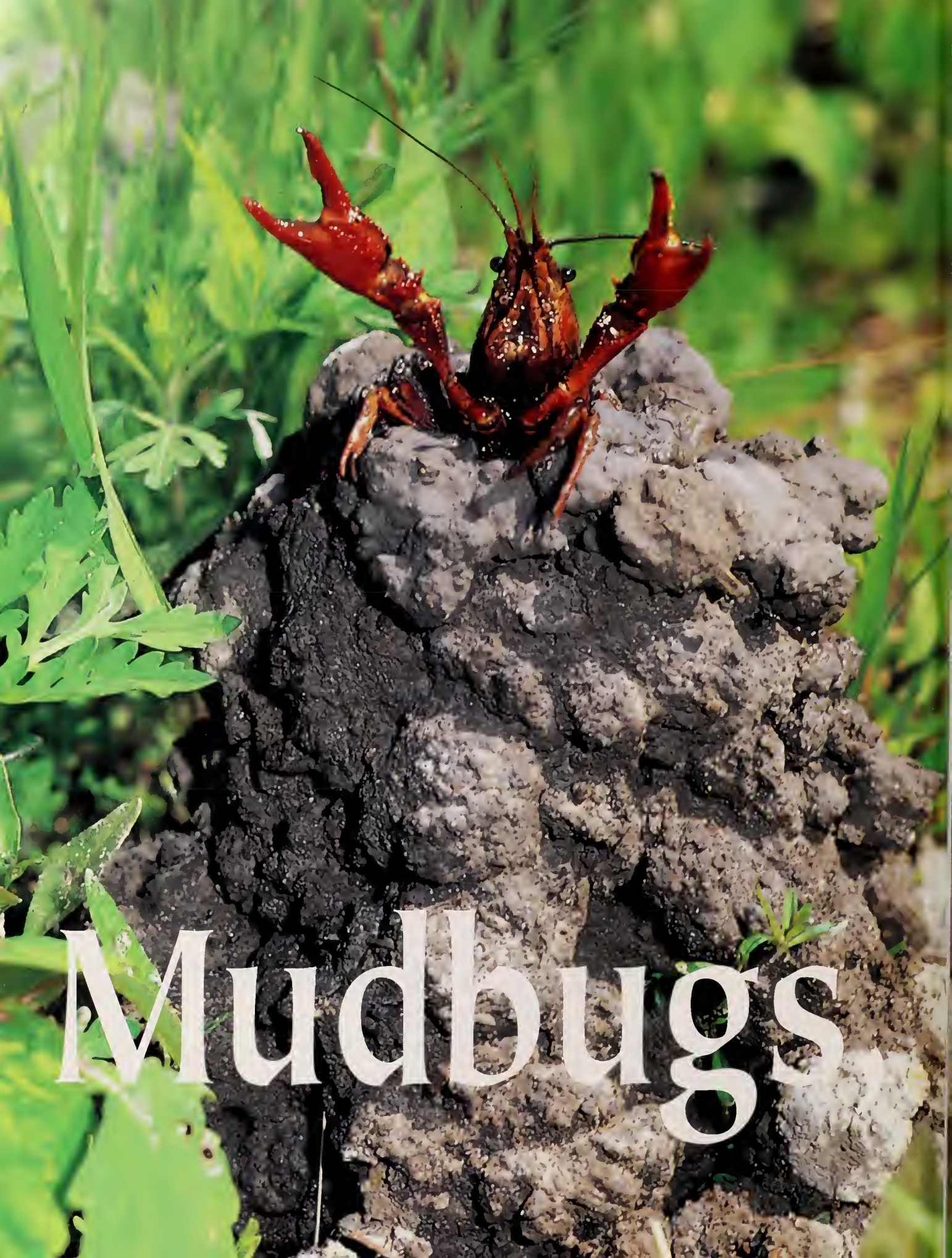
In early March I can look at my guide and pick out a few days in September and October that should provide good marsh henning tides. For example, the early morning high tides on September 26 through 28 look promising, with a tide of more than five feet above mean low water in the area where I hunt. If the wind were to blow from the northeast, pushing the tides even higher, it might even be a great marsh henning tide.

In early October, the tides recede as the sun, moon, and earth change slightly in alignment. During the first week the tide is to be only three to four feet above mean low, so the opportunities do not look great. Later in the month, however, near the same dates as in September, the tide rises again to more than five feet above mean low water.

If my friend who consulted the Solunar Tables could see me poring over my NOAA tide charts right now, I'm sure he would be proud. It's the Age of Aquarius, he would say. With our knowledge of the planets, we no longer have to rely on chance. □

Curtis Badger is a writer and photographer who lives along the Chesapeake Bay on the Eastern Shore.

- Clapper rails are hunted during high tides, when the water drives them from their hiding places in the coastal salt marshes.
- A small skiff, capable of being poled across a flooded marsh meadow, is needed. Shooting rails under motor power is illegal.
- Light loads in 12- to 20-gauge are suggested. Use shot as small as number 8 early in the season and larger shot later when the birds are larger. You'll be hunting in a salt water environment, so clean your shotgun thoroughly when you return.
- Consult the NOAA book of tide tables for information on the times of tides and the variance from mean low water.
- A current Virginia hunting license is required, but a migratory waterfowl stamp is not.



Mudbugs

A Swampy Success

by Jim Kastetter
Photographs by Dwight Dyke

The waterman pulls on his boots, fires up the engine, and heads out to hoist the day's bounty from the water. It's a familiar rhythm here in Virginia's Northern Neck.

Harvesting the water at dawn is a tradition as old as human life on this lush peninsula whose borders boast a litany of America's most historic waters—the Chesapeake Bay, the Potomac River, and the Rappahannock River. An increasing demand for crabs, oysters, and fin fish in these once-bounteous waters, however, is creating a new breed of waterman—or in Janet Sutton's case, water*woman*.

And it is developing a new method of gathering, as well. Sutton's harvesting is done by wading through four shallow ponds just a few hundred yards from her Northumberland County farm home. There is not a boat in sight.

Sutton is an aquaculturist, more precisely, a crayfish farmer, on ten acres of her 150-acre Longbranch Farm on the outskirts of Kilmarnock. "It was use it or lose it for those ten acres," Sutton notes. "I couldn't grow any traditional crops in that swampy area, and the law gave me one year to make it productive or it would revert to protected wetlands."

Since the land was becoming increasingly saturated and the clay base made a natural pond bottom, it became more and more clear to Sutton that aquaculture of some sort was her destiny. Her crop of choice comprises two of the more than 500 different species of crayfish found around the world. Sutton farms both the Red Swamp *(Procambarus clarki)* and White River *(Procambarus acutus)* crayfish.

This formerly unproductive area now supports an unusual farming venture.

Blazing a new path, Janet Sutton is one of a growing number of aquaculturists. She raises crayfish on her farm in Northumberland County.

In recent years, several entrepreneurs have tried aquaculture in the Northern Neck. There have been attempts at raising striped bass, eels, and talapia, but Sutton is the first, and the only one in all of the Commonwealth, to give crayfish a try.

Crayfish—known regionally by names such as "crawfish," "crawdads," "mudbugs," and "creek crabs,"—are popular items in both the bait shops and the grocery stores. It seems that there is nothing higher on the food chain. Crayfish are food for all, from diners reveling in the Redneck Risotto (see recipe at end of this article) offered by Chef Jimmy Sneed at his nationally-acclaimed The Frog and the Redneck Restaurant in Richmond down the species ladder to the raccoons, herons, snakes and fish that eye Sutton's four crayfish ponds with the same anticipation of teenagers at a fast-food counter.

Bass fishermen have long known the powerful attraction that a crawdad holds for those lunker smallmouths that lie in wait in Virginia's fresh water lakes and streams. So potent a bait is the crawdad that anglers will pay up to a dollar apiece for the critters. They are well worth it to smallmouth fishermen who are after the big bronze backs that prefer to ambush their prey from under downed logs in slow water. And the prey most often nabbed is crayfish. Smallmouths aren't the only fish to enjoy a crawdad dinner, however.

(Above) Sutton, along with her helper, Ruger, a chocolate lab, does most of the work on this "mudbug" farm. Sutton empties her traps at sun-up and (bottom right) places her fresh catch in purging tanks.

Panfish of all varieties are partial to whole, small crayfish or peeled crayfish tails. And savvy trout fishermen have known for years that big trout eat big food—small frogs, salamanders, minnows, and, of course, crayfish. Nothing beats the late-evening brown trout action on a small lake with a large crayfish population. The browns focus on the crayfish which become most active during low-light conditions from dusk until dawn.

Nocturnal by nature, the crayfish burrow into the banks and shallow areas of the lake, and the trout come to find them on the lake margins throughout the summer. Mountain lake fly fishermen do quite well with crayfish-like flies when they dance the lure over the bottom, imitating the crawdad's backward crawl.

Sutton and Longbranch Farm see to it that both the sportsmen and the gourmets are supplied, but unfortunately it's a short year for the crayfish farmer.

Northern Neck crawdads thrive from mid-April until early July. They are temperature sensitive. When the water goes much below 70 degrees or raises to 85 or 90, the crayfish burrow into the clay banks of the shallow ponds and are gone until the following spring. They may show up for a brief time in the fall, but that's mating time and it does not produce a satisfactory table product. Their attention to mating, and not to foraging, does not provide the nutrition to produce the firm tail meat that marks high-quality shellfish, a condition that Sutton calls "hollow-tail syndrome. It's not a disease," she is quick to note, "just a condition."

This short season for farming the critters makes Sutton's farm the northern boundary for such an enterprise, and she handles it for now as a one-person operation.

Sutton's day starts with sun-up when she dons her waders and collects the menhaden, "bunkers" as some call them in the Northern Neck, that she uses to bait the crayfish traps. She whistles up Ruger, her chocolate Lab and fires up the ATV for the run down to the ponds. Once there, she walks the ponds and empties the pyramid-shaped traps

that rest on the shallow bottom, their tops just above the water's surface. Ruger splashes loyally beside her, content with the occasional reward of a small fish from a trap.

In a few hours, she has harvested the catch, re-baited the traps, and made her way up to the purging shed where she grades the crayfish according to size. The smallest, "peelers" run as many as 50 to the pound and are destined for bait shops like Green Top and the Pony Pasture in Richmond. Jumbos—10 or so to the pound—will go to restaurants like Richmond's The Frog and The Redneck and Gumbo-Ya- Ya.

Each grade stays in a separate freshwater purging tank for 24 hours before it goes to market. The 24-hour rest cleans the muddy pond water from their systems and leaves the meat with a creamy color, a firm texture, and a delicately sweet flavor.

That 24 hours is a critical period for the crayfish, however. If they stay in the tanks much longer than that, they get feisty and begin to see each other as others see them—food. Fights ensue, and the crayfish farmer loses product. Not a tolerable circumstance in the farmer's short season, so Sutton uses her afternoons to move the crayfish harvested the day before.

Another threat in the purging tanks comes when the crayfish molt their shells in order to grow, much like the Chesapeake Bay's famous blue crabs. Crawdads absorb the calcium in their systems, concentrate it in two half-domed deposits of calcium carbonate the size of small peas and store it directly behind their eyes. After they have squirmed free of their old shells, they release the calcium and it goes back into their system to develop a new, larger shell into which the crayfish can grow. The pellets of calcium carbonate are absorbed into the new shell to give it hardness. During the time the crayfish are without their shells, however, they are particularly vulnerable to cannibalistic attacks from their brethren.

Sutton runs her hand over the bottom of a purging tank and comes up with three or four calcium carbonate "pearls," as she calls them. When a shedding crayfish is devoured by the others, the only things that aren't eaten are the calcium deposits. "Sometimes after a full moon, you can find a hundred of these pearls in the bottom of each tank," she notes. The molting cycle of the crayfish is tied to a lunar cycle, as it is with many other species.

If all goes well, and Sutton loses no more than the expected few to the terrors of the tanks, she has her marketable products ready for delivery. Having started her aquaculture venture just three years ago, she sells all that she can currently raise. That translates into about four-hundred pounds per acre, which is twice what she expected at this stage of the business. Her enterprise won't reach full production for another two years, however, and at that time she anticipates an annual harvest nearing 1500 pounds per acre.

Natural reproduction takes care of the restocking of the ponds, but there are other concerns with which she must contend.

Crayfish are migratory—and unpredictable. For reasons known largely to the crayfish themselves, they may decide to leave their carefully tended ponds for parts unknown. Sutton has gone to great lengths to keep them happy where they are, and, with four large, separate ponds, she has reason to expect that they might simply trade one pond for another. "I have seen one or two on the highway into town on rare occasion. They just rear back and wave their claws at the passing cars," she laughs.

Sutton's Longbranch Farm raises crayfish organically, without the use of hormones, steroids, antibiotics, fertilizers, pesticides, or insecticides. This produces a fresh, high quality, high protein gourmet shellfish that is lower in calories, fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol than either shrimp or lobster. In a 100 gram (3.5 ounce) portion, there are only 76 calories and a full 16 grams of protein, while fat measures only 1.1 grams, saturated fat 0.18 grams, and cholesterol only 139 milligrams.

In the relatively new, but growing, corps of aquaculturists, Janet Sutton is something of a pioneer. In addition to designing the physical arrangements for the facility, she had to forge her way through a labyrinth of little-known state and local permits, certificates, and permissions to farm her crayfish. The next crawdad farmer in Northumberland County is going to find the way much easier because of Sutton's perseverance.

What happens if her risk doesn't pan out? "I'll make it a wildlife sanctuary," she vows. "It already looks like one with all the animals that sit waiting at pond's edge at sunrise. Either way, it will always be my sanctuary." That's what Northern Neck watermen have said for centuries. ☐

Jim Kastetter is a freelance writer and graphic designer who lived along the Rappahannock River for six years and now directs his own communication and marketing studio in Henderson, N.C.

Redneck Risotto

Chef Jimmy Sneed,
The Frog and The Redneck

Stone Ground Grits
1 cup Awesome Stone Ground Grits
1 tbs. butter
4 cups stock (chicken, fish, or veal)
3 tsp. sea salt

Heat the grits and stock, while stirring, to a simmer. Cook for 30-35 minutes. Stir in butter and season with sea salt.

Sausage
12 oz. cooked high quality sausage—Sneed uses Edwards & Sons—cut into cubes

Crayfish
1 lb. crayfish
20 whole black peppercorns
3 bay leaves
Sea salt or Kosher salt

In a large pot of boiling water add the 20 whole black peppercorns, 3 bay leaves and the sea or kosher salt. When the water is at a rolling boil, add the pound of live crayfish and cook on medium for three minutes. Turn off heat and allow to sit for two more minutes. Put crayfish into an ice bath, then clean shells, and fold tail meat into the risotto along with the mushrooms and sausage.

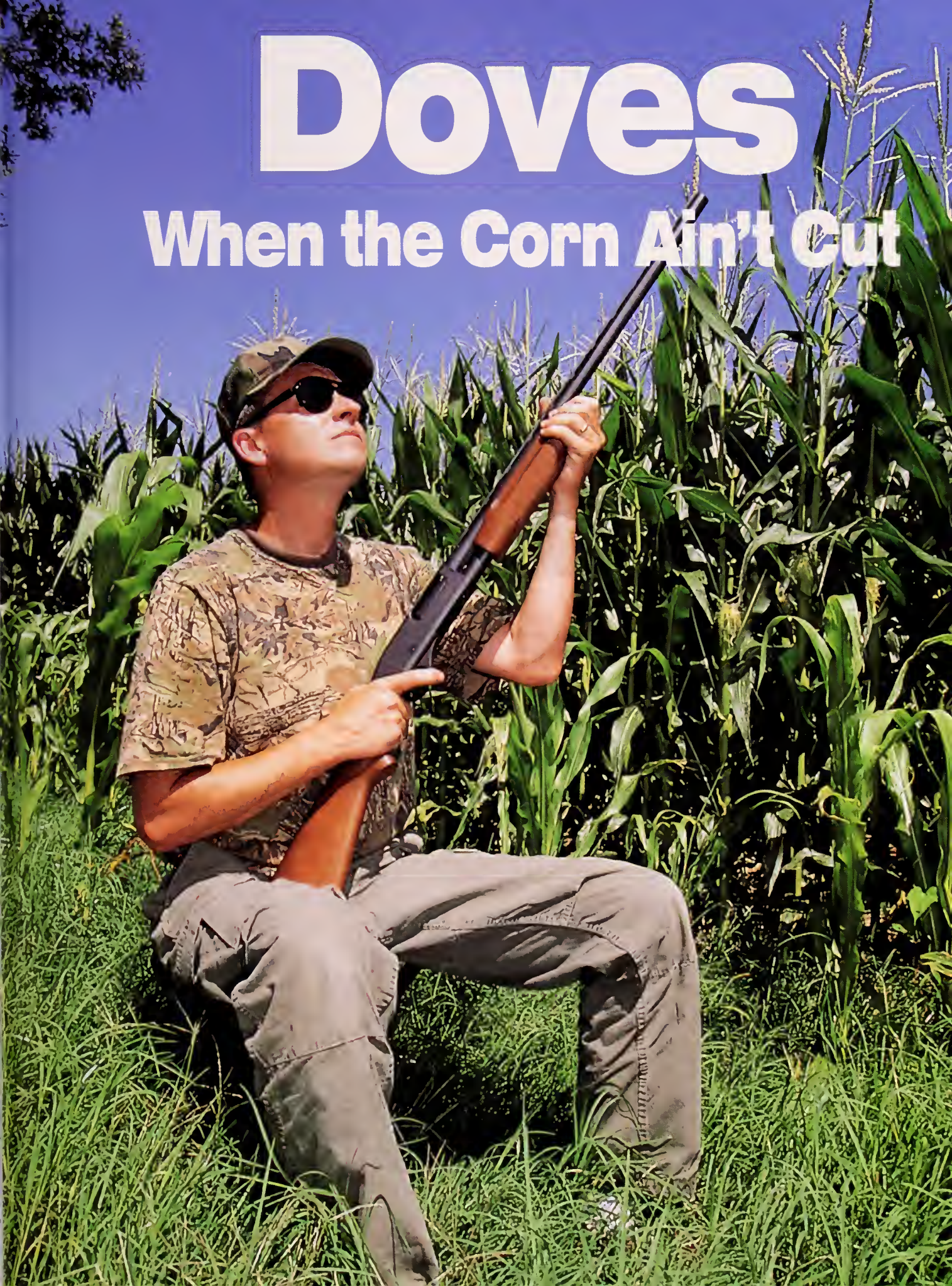
Sauteed Shiitake Mushrooms
2 lbs. fresh shiitake mushrooms
2 cloves fresh garlic, peeled and finely diced
2 fresh shallots, peeled and finely diced
2 oz. unsalted butter, cubed
Sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper
Extra virgin olive oil
2 oz. stock (chicken or fish)

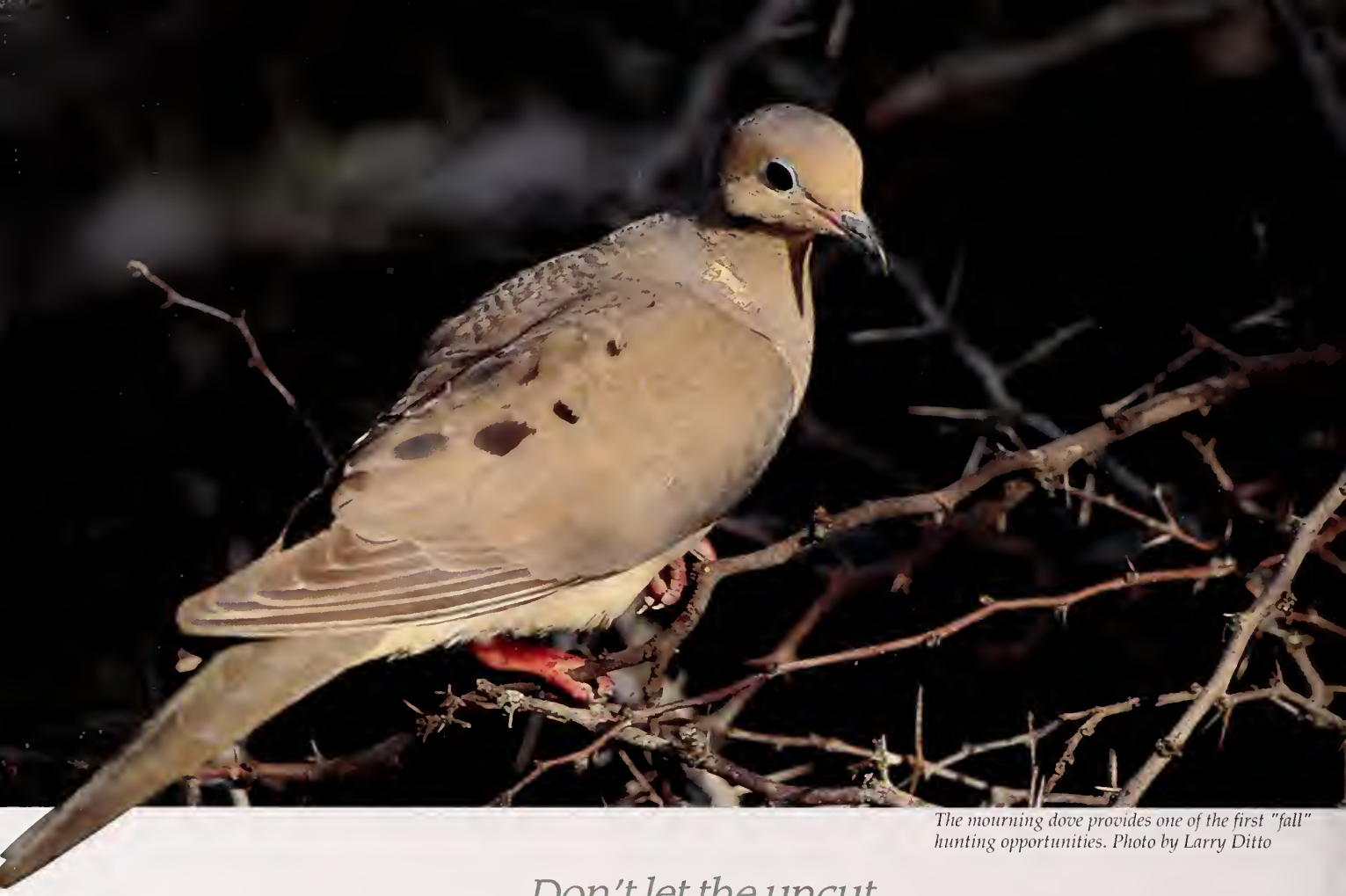
Remove the stems from the mushrooms and discard. Slice the caps into ⅛ inch slices. Shiitakes are generally very clean and may need only a slight brushing off. Heat a heavy pan till very hot, cast iron if possible, and put in ¼ inch of olive oil. Add the mushrooms and cook for 30 seconds. Salt and pepper to taste while they are cooking. Add the garlic and shallots; do not color or burn. After 1 minute, add the stock to stop the cooking. Mix the grits, crayfish, sausage, shiitakes and 3 oz. of grated parmesan cheese. Spoon the "risotto" into heated soup plates and sprinkle with grated parmesan.

Jimmy Sneed is a nationally-acclaimed chef and has been featured on Julia Child's "Master Chefs" television program several times. His marvelous food at his The Frog and The Redneck restaurant is procured from local Virginia producers.

Doves

When the Corn Ain't Cut





The mourning dove provides one of the first "fall" hunting opportunities. Photo by Larry Ditto

by Bob Gooch

Don't let the uncut cornfields deter your early season dove hunting. Try scouting some unconventional areas.

It was hot and humid as only August can be, but it was also the final week of the long summer month when I escaped into the air-conditioned comfort of a local gun and tackle shop. Despite the near impossible weather, I was looking forward to the opening of the dove season the following Monday. I said as much as I greeted a friend of long standing, a fellow dove hunter.

"Yeah, but where're you going to hunt? The corn ain't cut yet."

He was right, of course, finding a harvested cornfield is becoming increasingly difficult in early September. It's a trend that often prompts hunters to complain that the season is opening too soon. But when? It's often weeks, or even months, before a ripe cornfield is harvested. A couple of years ago I waited in vain for the farmer to harvest one of my favorite cornfields, and when he finally did so the early dove season had closed.

It's a fact of the modern dove hunter's life that changing agricultural practices are playing games with his early-season hunting. In many parts of Virginia, growing corn is a fading practice in modern agriculture. There just aren't as many cornfields anymore, and those that do exist are rarely harvested by the opening of the dove season. I suppose a major exception is the corn crop that is harvested for silage. That's a possible answer. Look for farms with silos and approach the owner.

I agreed with my friend. Not only are corn crops being harvested too late for early dove hunting, but in many parts of Virginia there just "ain't any corn anymore!" Such is the plight of the modern dove hunter.

Despite the scarcity of harvested cornfields, there are a lot of doves in Virginia when the season opens around the first of September. The dove is a prolific breeder, hatching as many as a half dozen broods during a long rearing season. Some of the flimsy nests are lost to storms, but it doesn't take the bird long to build another. The result is an abundance of birds as we approach the September opening date. In fact the dove population is at its peak of annual abundance when the season opens. And this doesn't include the migrants that move into the state from the north with the approach of the harsh northern winters. Most of

the birds we hunt in September are young, the offspring of resident birds. Many are small, some little more than half grown—but they don't fly like youngsters!

Plenty of birds, but no place to hunt. Frustrating.

But those birds are going to eat. They aren't going to starve. Not in late summer! A long, harsh winter might take its toll, but that's months away. They need food and water. Water is seldom a problem in Virginia, and if "the corn ain't cut" there is plenty of other food available in late summer. When harvested cornfields are lacking, the key to successful hunting is locating those other feeding areas.

Scattered grain and the seeds of weeds are the staples in a dove's diet, but they have to be in the right place to attract the birds. The bird isn't going to alight in tall grass or weeds where it might quickly become the victim of an equally hungry fox, house cat, or some other lurking predator. That's one reason harvested cornfields appeal to them. The ground cover is thin. In fact the harvesting operations may all but bare the ground. The birds feel safe with that good visibility.

And it isn't just the scattered corn that attracts them. There are also the scattered weed seeds—exposed when the crop is harvested. Some hunters insist the exposed seeds are more of an attraction than the scattered grain. Regardless, the feeding conditions are ideal in a harvested cornfield.

The problem today is that ideal situation doesn't exist often enough. Spend some time and you might locate such a hunting area, but if you can't don't give up. Somewhere out there the doves are feeding and good hunting awaits you.

Grass and cattle farming is increasing as crop farming fades, and this means hayfields instead of corn. And hay is often harvested just as the early dove season is opening. Just about any freshly clipped field offers scattered seed, but for some reason doves don't visit all of them. The dove is social by nature, however, and if one or two put down to feed others will follow. Over the years I've enjoyed some good shooting over harvested hayfields, even though it is a hit-and-miss kind of thing.

Another opening day and another year when cornfields stood untouched on opening day, I found good shooting in a green cow pasture. Fortunately the cattle were not feeding nearby. It was a large pasture, approximately 20 acres, but it was closely grazed making it ideal for doves.

I had noticed doves circling the field and alighting on the far side. Apparently they had found good feeding there. I invited a neighbor to join me and we took stands along a flyway they seemed to be using to enter and leave the field.

"What are they feeding on?" asked my friend.

"Dunno, but it's some kind of weed the cattle don't eat. Plenty of seeds for the birds to feed on."

The weed patch wasn't large enough to attract a big flock of birds. It wouldn't support a big shoot, but the two of us enjoyed steady, if not fast, shooting. I don't recall that we got limits, but we took home good bags of doves.

A more recent September following a dry summer, a local farmer had been forced to supplement the parched pasture grass with hay. The feeding area, of course, concentrated the cattle, and the doves flocked in. "Saw at least a 100 on that power line yesterday," he told me. I am not sure it was the seeds from the scattered hay or something in the cow droppings that attracted the birds. Maybe both.

I enjoyed a number of good afternoons of shooting over that cattle feeding area. Eventually they moved on—found a better feeding area or migrated south.

There was another time that a friendly farmer, listening to me complain about not being able to find any doves, suggested I try his cattle feeding area. Another dry summer. I did, but the shooting wasn't as productive as the situation described before. But I didn't complain then, nor would I now.

One cool September day a friend and I were float-fishing a nearby river for smallmouth bass, and we kept flushing doves from sandbars. Off in the distance we could hear the constant chatter of shotguns, obviously some hunters had found a harvested cornfield and were enjoying a conventional dove shoot. Drifting quietly, we were often within shotgun range of those birds, but had not brought along guns. Having fed in the nearby cornfield, the birds were visiting the river for water and possible tiny grains of sand for their craws—to help digest their feed. Later during the December dove season which overlapped the waterfowl season, another friend and I were floating that same river jump shooting ducks. Recalling that earlier September experience, I kept my eyes peeled for doves and managed to drop a few when it was my turn in the bow of the canoe. The shooting could well have been much better earlier in October when the early duck season and the dove season overlapped—had it occurred to us earlier. This was before the days of steel shot, and the size 6 high-brass loads were a bit heavy for doves, but our bag at the end of the trip contained doves as well as ducks. A word of caution. A motor-driven boat is illegal for this kind of hunting.

Still another September dove season and a scarcity of places to hunt, and I was moaning to the local game warden about my plight. Game wardens spend most of their working days in the field and most are observant while keeping their eyes open for game law violators. "I flushed a big bunch of birds out of a pokeberry patch the other day," he offered. "Maybe you should try that." And I did. Pokeberry patches are not hard to find, and sure enough several doves flushed from the first one I approached. I moved closer to study the setup, and the reason the doves were there quickly became obvious. The big pokeberry leaves had shaded out most of the sun over the summer and the ground beneath them was fairly clear of grass and weeds. And covered with fallen berries! No

wonder doves liked what they found there.

I set up nearby and waited, but not for long. Suddenly a lone dove circled overhead and alighted among the pokeberries. And then there was another—and another. I enjoyed a couple of hours of good shooting, and left elated and grateful for the tip from the warden.

Over the years I've had little or no success hunting doves at waterholes as they do in the more arid regions of the West. Water is too available in Virginia to concentrate the birds at any single watering spot.

Roosts, on the other hand, can offer limited shooting if you can locate them. With shooting ending at sunset, however, roosts usually provide probably a half hour of shooting at the most—and late in the day. But it can be fast shooting and highly productive, a lot of action packed into a few fleeting minutes. Roosts are also easier to locate later in the season when the birds seek groves of evergreens for the protection they offer from the winter winds.

A few years ago I found doves using a somewhat isolated stand of evergreens. It was small, surrounded by open fields, and the birds seemed to prefer it over larger pine forests nearby. I hunted that evergreen grove for several years, getting out late in the day, and enjoying some fast shooting until the sunset warned me it was over. I found that the roost shooting was much better during the late seasons than in the early one, primarily I suspect, because the doves needed the protection of the evergreens more during the colder months.

Eventually, for reasons unknown to me, the doves discontinued the use of the grove for roosting. It might have been because crows more or less took it over for their own winter roosts.

Hunting doves in these unconventional areas means doing some scouting prior to the season. It puts the hunting back into dove hunting. Conventional dove shoots over harvested grainfields boil down to shooting and little more. The word goes out that the birds are using a particular field and just about every dove hunter in the neighborhood descends on it for opening day. Fun, sure, but not hunting.

Preseason scouting may mean nothing more than driving back roads and looking for doves resting on utility lines or in dead leafless trees. They are usually gathered there for a reason, that reason being that they have located a good feeding area. They will eventually leave those utility lines or that dead tree and alight nearby. Watch them for awhile and you should be able to find some good shooting. It's also a good idea to watch for areas where a number of doves may be picking grit alongside the road.

Having thus located some birds, the next step is to locate the owner of the property and get permission to hunt it. This is not always easy. Sometimes it's harder to locate the owner than it is to find the dove feeding area.

I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of harvested cornfield dove shoots I've enjoyed over the last half a dozen years, I miss those old days when the corn was harvested by opening day, but the fact that "the corn ain't cut" doesn't prevent my enjoying some good dove hunting every September.

I work a bit harder at it, and for that reason probably enjoy my new approach to dove hunting more. □

Bob Gooch is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife *magazine.*

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POP TH
FOR SMA

by Harry Murray

POPPER FISHING IS NOT ONLY ENJOYABLE BUT THE ACTION IS FAST AND EXCITING.

Taking smallmouth bass on a popper with a fly rod is one of the most gratifying forms of fishing I know. Many anglers are attracted to this because they enjoy seeing the seductive actions they can impart to the bugs while others like the thrill of seeing a nice bass explode from the water as it hits a popper solidly. Blend this with the fact that poppers consistently give us some of our largest bass, and it is easy to understand the broad appeal of this fine form of smallmouth angling.

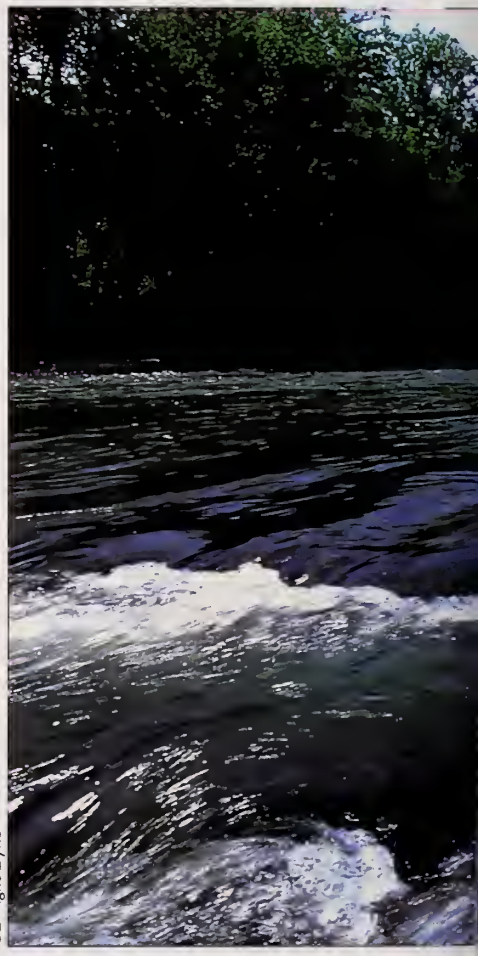
Certain bugs and techniques produce better than others under various conditions so it behooves us to evaluate the bass'es demands and preferences and then adjust our tactics accordingly. These whims are influenced predominantly by seasonal changes so a meaningful approach to our analysis would be to start in the early part of the season and proceed until fall.

SHENANDOAH CHUGGAR, MOTTLED CHARTREUSE

By early June many of our smallmouth rivers are producing good action with surface poppers. Admittedly the stream volumes at this time of the year require that we be a little selective in the areas we fish with poppers.

One of the most consistent areas I've found are the protected pockets behind ledges which protrude above the stream's surface. These ledges act like miniature dams deflecting the main currents around the ends while providing calm protected areas immediately below them. I like to wade in from below these ledges and cast a popper straight up into the flat, calm water. I allow the bug to remain motionless for about five seconds then give it several gentle twitches with my line hand to make it look alive. I continue this pause-twitch-pause retrieve until I've fished the popper about 10 feet then I pick it up and recast it to a spot several feet to the side of the first target. If I take several fish here quickly I'll continue fishing all of the protected water below the ledge. The basic cup faced popper such as the famous Shenandoah Chugger in size 4 and 8 is great for this type fishing. Chartreuse or gray body colors have proven themselves to be quite dependable.

Other areas which have been good to me when fishing poppers early in the season are the back eddies which form against the banks immediately below some riffles. These eddies may be as small as a card table or half as big as a tennis court, but they all possess one appealing aspect to a surface bug angler—they provide slower currents and calmer surfaces than much of the rest of the river at this time of the year. This means the smallmouth can easily feed upon the surface at their leisure. The many large bass which are attracted to these eddies justify special consideration. There are two distinctly separate setups in the back eddies dictated by the currents for which I use two slightly different tactics.



©Dwight Dyke

E CORK
LLMOUTH

Riffles are home for an abundance of minnows and hold the smallmouth that you're trying to attract with your popper.
Fly photos ©Dwight Dyke.

The outer edges of a back eddy, immediately adjacent to the main river currents, often hold some large bass which stay on feeding stations just inside the protected eddy. These fish feed on any morsels the main part of the river brings within their views and can often be taken fairly easily. I like to wade or float down the main part of the river about 50 feet out from these edges and drop a popper right on the uppermost section where the fast current of the main portion of the stream meets the slow current in the eddy. Often the strike will come within the first several seconds, so be ready. If the bug drifts five feet without a take, I've found that several firm six inch long strips with my line hand frequently prompts a take. Due to the need of attracting the bass'es attention, poppers which are capable of creating a noisy action such as the Shenandoah Shad Popper, and the Yellow Darter are good choices.

The central portion of the back eddy possesses an entirely different set of demands as a result of its slow Lazy Susan currents. Natural foods here are carried around and around, enabling the bass to feed at their leisure thus permitting a much closer scrutiny of their prey. For this reason I try to fish my popper with a slow, teasing action. I've found that poppers constructed with soft webby hackles or delicate rubber legs do a great job in this "eye of the back eddy." As soon as my bug touches the water I get tight to it and by jiggling my line hand induce a tantalizing, quivering action to it. I'll continue this action for about five seconds then pause five seconds. If, after repeating this several times, I do not get a strike, I pick up the bug and cast it to a slightly different portion of the back eddy.

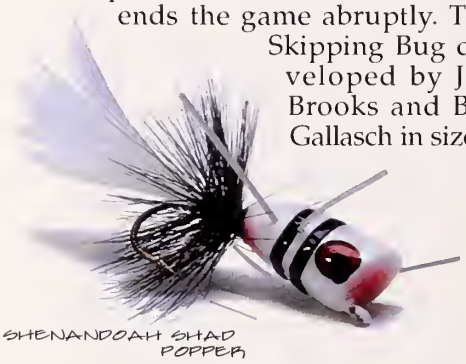
DAMSEL SHENANDOAH POPPER

There is one point I must make about fishing the back eddies. Because of the slow currents and often shallow water depths found here, the large bass are very wary and thus can be easily spooked by careless wading or sloppy casting. Go easy!

Even though many of our rivers hold full water levels in the early part of the summer the bass know quite well how to adjust to this con-

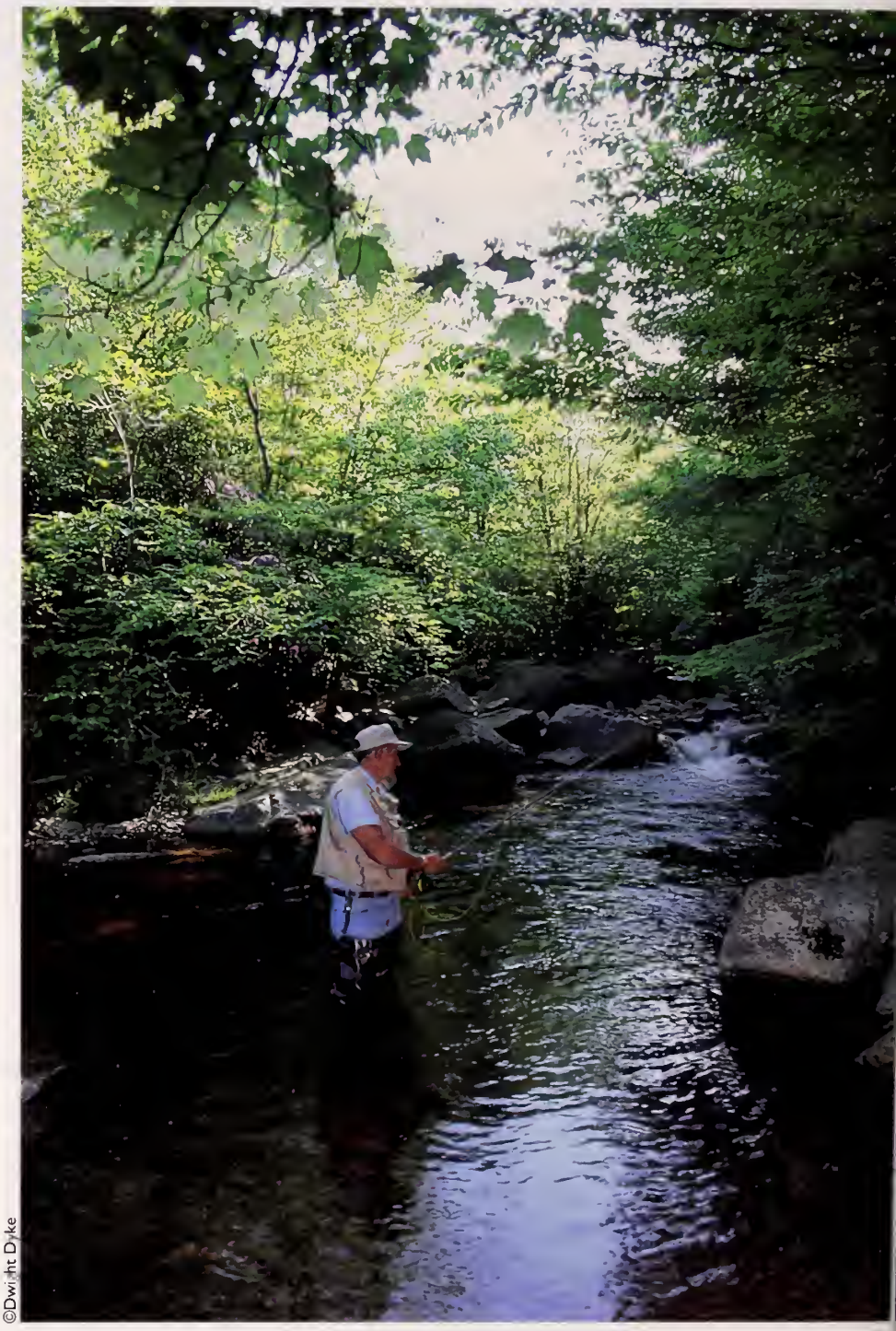
dition and feed accordingly. Excellent popper fishing can be experienced by casting to bass chasing minnows in the shallows. Admittedly some of these areas may be almost dry land when the river drops later in the year, but right now they are gold mines.

Shiner minnows are always present in these shallows and the bass know it. Often I'll see the minnows splashing along the surface as they flee a marauding bass. This is my cue to shoot my popper out in front and slightly beyond the fleeing minnows and bring it to life with several foot long strips with my line hand. A splashy, erratic action is definitely preferable here to attract the bass'es attention. However, if after a few casts I haven't gotten a strike, I've found I improve my chances if I hold my cast until he shows again rather than continue to simply pound the water. Often repeated casting without knowing where the bass is spooks him off the shallows and ends the game abruptly. The Skipping Bug developed by Joe Brooks and Bill Gallasch in size 4



is an excellent popper for this type fishing.

As the rivers recede the upper portions of the pools, just where the riffles dump into them, yield many nice smallmouths to poppers. The riffles are home for an abundance of minnows and many find their way down into the main parts of the pools. Wounded minnows here become easy prey for the bass who are on a constant lookout for them. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact location of this type feeding so I like to cover the riffle-pool interface all the way across the river. I position myself in the lower portion of the riffle where a 50 to 60-foot cast across and slightly downstream will allow me to fish my popper across the slightly slower water below. If I take a few fish here quickly I'll fish all the way across the river with this down and across current popper tactic.


©Dwight Dyke

In order to devise a popper to mimic this wounded minnow action we drew on the plug casters arsenal. I merely suggested to Bill Ballasch that the old Creek Chub Darter plug was a great producer below these riffles and he started experimenting. Eventually the Darter Popper with the same open-mouth design of the famous plug evolved. The greatest asset I've found on this Darter Popper is its versatility. I can produce more different minnow-type actions out of this popper than any I've ever used.

For example, by pointing the rod tip at the bug on the water and imparting several sharp six-inch strips with my line hand the Darter dashes erratically from side to side, much like a minnow swimming rapidly in an attempt to master the fast currents. If I apply a long, slow pull with my line hand followed by a pause the Darter wobbles seductively then bobs back to the surface much like a minnow failing in a last feeble attempt to dive below the water. Repeating this slow two foot long pull interrupted by five second drifts will bring many bass to the surface which are not tempted by conventional bug play. Caution, the take usually comes during the pause when the line is slack so be ready to strike the bass quickly. The Darter Poppers in size 4 in either a yellow or white color is an important part of my bug selection.

Numerous aquatic insects emerge from our rivers in the early part of the summer prompting the bass to "look up." Many of these insect sippers can be induced into taking some of our more subtle poppers such as the Sunfish Slider and the Chartreuse Slider in sizes 6 and 8. These pointed nose bugs can be fished quite effectively with a very minimal amount of manipulation. Depending upon the density of the hatch, smallmouths may feed in two different ways.

If there is a very heavy emergence or a concentrated return of spinners laying eggs the bass may select specific feeding stations much like trout and sip in the natural insect as the currents offer them. This is easy fishing and it can be quite productive. Spotting a consistent riser, I select a casting position below and slightly to the side of my fish and deliver my popper a foot or two above him, letting the current carry it to him in a natural manner. Often I need to impart no action at all to the bug in order to prompt a strike from the bass; if I do anything, it is only a slow sliding action with the line hand.

During a sparse hatch the bass will often cruise about looking for the insects. This moving target necessitates a slightly different tactic. Here you have two choices. The instant you see a rise you can quickly deliver a cast to that spot, knowing, that at least for a moment, where the fish is. I find this approach very effective. A second ploy is to watch for the bass'es rise form, try to anticipate his cruising path then deliver your bug out in front of him.

By midsummer a situation is unfolding which provides first class popper fishing until fall. The aquatic grass beds in our rivers are now thick enough to provide dependable cover to a broad assortment of minnows and aquatic insects. Smallmouth bass cannot resist this concentration of easy meals and can be found here almost any time of the day.

Some of the fine popper fishing I know occurs on the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers where these grass beds grow along several hundred feet of the river reaching from the banks out into the rivers 20 to 30 feet. I like to position myself out in the main part of the river about 50 feet from these grass beds and cover them methodically with repeated casts to the edges. Accuracy in casting the bug tight against the grass often means the difference between taking several large bass and getting skunked. For example, recently I was fishing one of the edges and dropped my popper about two feet off the grass and did not receive a strike. The cover looked so good that I could not believe I didn't raise a bass. In my disbelief I shot a second cast to the same area, but this time my popper fell to the water about three inches from the grass. Crunch, I took the largest bass of the day!

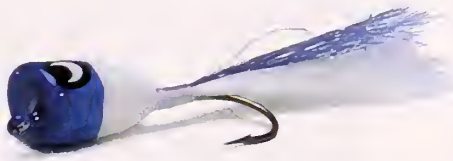
Using the Damsel Shenandoah Popper I'll work my way down the river, carefully delivering each successive cast to a spot about a foot below the last cast. It is not at all unusual to catch a dozen nice bass with this tactic along 200 feet of one of these grass beds.

In the latter part of the summer grass beds can be found throughout midstream in the slower sections of the river. These grass beds are seldom as solid as those found along the river banks and are often punctuated with open pockets the size of an automobile. Bass hold in these open pockets and pick off anything that drifts by. Last summer I was showing a student in one of my fly fishing schools how to carefully wade through the thick grass and cast a popper into these open pockets, when crash! I hooked one of the largest smallmouth bass I'd seen all year. This "picking the pockets" ploy can be one of the most rewarding tactics for late summer, low water popper fishing. There are several excellent reasons for this bonanza which one should learn from in order to expand his game.

First, the grass hides our approach as we wade into casting positions. I'm firmly convinced that one of the main reasons we do not take more large bass is because we scare them with our approach and casting. Realizing that their wariness is amplified by the low stream levels of late summer, it becomes readily apparent that we can use the grass beds to our advantage.

SHENANDOAH CHUGGAR, GRAY SCALED

SHENANDOAH DARTER, MOTTLED YELLOW/BLACK



SHENANDOAH BASS SKIPPING BUG, BLUE/WHITE

Look to the feeder stream's cooler water to attract fish. Fly photos © Dwight Dyke.

A second feature afforded by the midstream grass beds is the shade it provides the smallmouths. Realizing that the largest bass do not like direct, bright sunlight one can readily understand why they will hold in the open pockets just below the edges of the grass beds and comfortably pick off any food which comes within view.

Yes, there can be situations in which the grass becomes almost solid in midstream negating angling opportunities. This is when you are called upon to think before you act. Knowing that the grass is going to grow the thickest where the current is the slowest and there is the greatest chance for the sun to shine on it all day long, one looks for just the opposite. For example, several years ago our rivers were very low late in the summer and many of the old dependable areas looked more like golf courses than they did smallmouth runs. Foolishly I tried to contend with this for several hours fishing one morning before I admitted to myself that my angling habits were overruling my brain. Finally I hopped into the Jeep and drove upstream several miles to an area I know held much faster currents and where the river swung in beside a long bank covered with large oak trees which provided solid shade to the water beneath. There was very little aquatic grass here and I had excellent fishing by pounding the shaded bank with poppers.

As fall approaches the water temperature drops, eventually pushing the smallmouths into slightly deeper pockets. However, this period, just before winter finally closes the door, can provide excellent popper action.

The best topwater action I find at this time of the year comes from the four- to six-feet deep cuts and pockets between the ledges. Ledges, often protruding above the stream's surface, run across the rivers perpendicular to the currents. The protected cuts downstream of these ledges are often packed with bass which now prefer these areas to the shallow. I like to wade upstream and splat my poppers into these protected areas. Easy does it—in many cases if you take one or two nice bass out of one of these areas you can often take six or eight more.

A reasonable assortment of poppers for smallmouths should include a variety of body styles which are capable of producing different actions. Mine includes Darters, Sliders, Shenandoah Damsel Poppers, Skipping Bugs and Shenandoah Chuggers. Sizes 4 through 8 cover the majority of our needs. Productive colors include black, olive, yellow, and white with gray and chartreuse coming on strong in recent years.

Taking smallmouth bass on popping bugs is one of the most enjoyable forms of angling I've ever experienced. Not only is the action fast and exciting, but often I take some of my largest bass on poppers. ☐

Soc Clay

Poppers, being topwater lures, are easily fished in grassey areas.

Harry Murray is a freelance writer who teaches fishing and fly tying in Edinburg, Virginia.

Spring Turkey Harvest for 1996

Virginia spring turkey hunters recorded a record harvest of 12,895 birds, according to the Wildlife Division, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Gary Norman, upland gamebird biologist, said that "The harvest represented a 10.3 percent increase over last year's record harvest of 11, 694." The harvest west of the Blue Ridge was 4,965 birds, an increase of 14.7 percent, while east of the Blue Ridge, hunters harvested 7,930 turkey gobblers, an increase of 7.7 percent. The top three counties were: Bedford (383), Franklin (348) and Buchanan (291).

"The harvest increase was encouraging given the late spring and poor weather conditions during the hunting season," Norman said. The Department projected higher turkey population densities and growth with the shorter fall season adopted last year. While the initial population response has been positive, it will be several years before population and harvest potentials are realized. Improvements in fall and spring turkey hunting quality are expected with future wild turkey population growth, according to Norman.

Following are the top ten counties for 1996:

1. Bedford (383)
2. Franklin (348)
3. Buchanan (291)
4. Scott (282)
5. Alleghany (255)
6. Amherst (253)
7. Grayson (247)
8. Pittsylvania (241)
9. Bath (223)
10. Rockbridge (221)

East of Blue Ridge-7,930
West of Blue Ridge-4,965

American Shad Restoration Project Completed for 1996

After a cold and damp spring, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' (VDGIF) 1996 American Shad Restoration Project has come to a close. This project was supported, in part, by commercial and saltwater recreational fishing license funds administered by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC). Commercial watermen collected spawning adults from the Pamunkey River from which 21.5 million fertilized shad eggs were obtained. Over 7.7 million young shad (known as fry) were raised and stocked from the VDGIF's King and Queen Fish Cultural Station and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery. The James River, above the City of Richmond, received 5.5 million young shad, while the Pamunkey River received over 2.1 million.

The young shad will stay in these rivers until fall. As water temperatures drop, they will swim down river, eventually reaching the Atlantic Ocean. There they will remain until maturity (about 3 to 5 years) before returning to freshwater to spawn. VDGIF biologists predict that one in every 400 fish stocked will survive to reach maturity.

The purpose of this project is to reintroduce American shad to historical spawning habitat in the upper James as fish passage facilities are constructed on dams blocking the river. Some of the shad stocked this spring were placed at Wingina, near Lynchburg, in hopes of establishing a spawning run of shad in this area of the river (some 140 miles above Richmond). For further information on this program contact Fisheries Biologist, Tom Gunter, in the VDGIF's Ashland District Office (804) 752-5503. □

Anglers Can Upgrade Fish Awards

On January 1, 1995, a new series of state trophy fish awards was made available to Virginia anglers through the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Angler Recognition Program. Starting July 1, 1996, anglers had the option to upgrade their previously issued trophy fish citation awards with the new series of certificates. Anglers who currently have fish registered in the Department's trophy fish awards program will be able to order replacements. There will be a $4 charge to replace certificates issued prior to January 1, 1996.

Anglers who have received their status as Master or Expert Anglers since January 1, 1995, have also been awarded new certificates and patches. These will be available for replacement as well. The price tag for replacing a master award will be $20, with the expert award costing $40. Nancy Archie, Coordinator for the Angler Recognition Program, explains that "as in the past, we are not charging for the actual master or expert award. When the angler orders a replacement master or expert

award, they will receive the appropriate number of individual trophy fish award certificates as well. For master anglers this is 5, for experts it is 10 fish. Each one costs $4."

Order forms for replacement trophy fish awards are available from the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' offices around the state. The Department hopes to have them to license agents around the beginning of October. An order form must accompany all requests for replacement.For additional information, you can phone the Virginia Angler Recognition Office at (804) 367-8916.

C. Newton

Bags of trash come ashore as a result of a cooperative shoreline cleanup effort in Northumberland County.

Northumberland County's Fourth Annual Shoreline Clean-up

by Colston Newton

In early June, more than 150 volunteers joined in the Northumberland Association for Progressive Stewardship's fourth annual shoreline clean-up.

Starting early in the morning, by noon, they had policed up four tons of assorted trash from the banks of several miles of Lodge Creek and the Yeocomico River in Northumberland County.

The junk collected ranged from old automobile tires to an abandoned toilet.

Northumberland's citizens and businesses gave full support to the effort.

NAPS used 20 volunteered skiffs to ferry the trash collectors ashore at their assigned areas and to haul the trash they picked up out to larger boats, which, to speed the collection, off-loaded the trash onto a pair of large aluminum "purse boats" from Zapata Protein's commercial menhaden fishing ship "Shearwater."

By unloading into the purse boats, the other boats saved time that otherwise would have been spent taking their loads to the collection point at Olverson's Marina.

In addition to the marina, Zapata Protein and Northumberland's other menhaden company, AMPRO Fisheries, dozens of area businesses contributed money, supplies and doorprizes to the effort.

The clean-up's volunteers included youngsters from Reedville's "Pollution Solution Kids," dozens of students from Northumberland High School and a heavy contingent of Northumberland's vigorous community of retired people

Since starting the program in 1993, NAPS, an all-volunteer citizen's group, has cleaned the shores of the Little Wicomico, the Great Wicomico, and the Coan rivers in addition to the waters spruced up this year. □

Steve Hickoff

VDGIF Board Member Catharine Tucker practices turkey calling with instructor J. T. Byrne.

Board Member Catharine Tucker Hunts Spring Gobblers

by Steve Hickoff

For many, springtime in Virginia means blooming dogwoods, morel mushroom picking, and trout fishing.

A self-avowed coldwater angler herself, Board Member Catharine Tucker of Richmond now has a new love: spring gobbler hunting.

Like the trout angler, wild turkey hunters must understand their quarry's natural habitat before applying traditional sporting tactics.

Catharine explains: "Hunters, above all else, know their quarry. This morning I looked and listened for turkeys, enhancing my previous hunter education, and the instruction I'd received this spring."

A participant in the recent 1996 "Spring Turkey Hunting Workshop for Women," Catharine learned necessary turkey hunting skills, which ranged from scouting birds to firearms safety.

Then, this past April, she hunted in the company of longtime Lowry, Virginia wild turkey hunter J. T. Byrne, a Quaker Boy Pro-Staffer and Turkey Trot Acres guide who volunteered his time.

Under showery Virginia skies, their two-day spring hunt involved locating vocal gobblers on the roost,

with J.T. calling to these birds. They watched male wild turkeys strut in the distance, as hens fed nearby.

Such gobblers consistently answered J.T.'s calls, but with such turkeys flanked by plenty of hens, no bearded birds stepped into gun range.

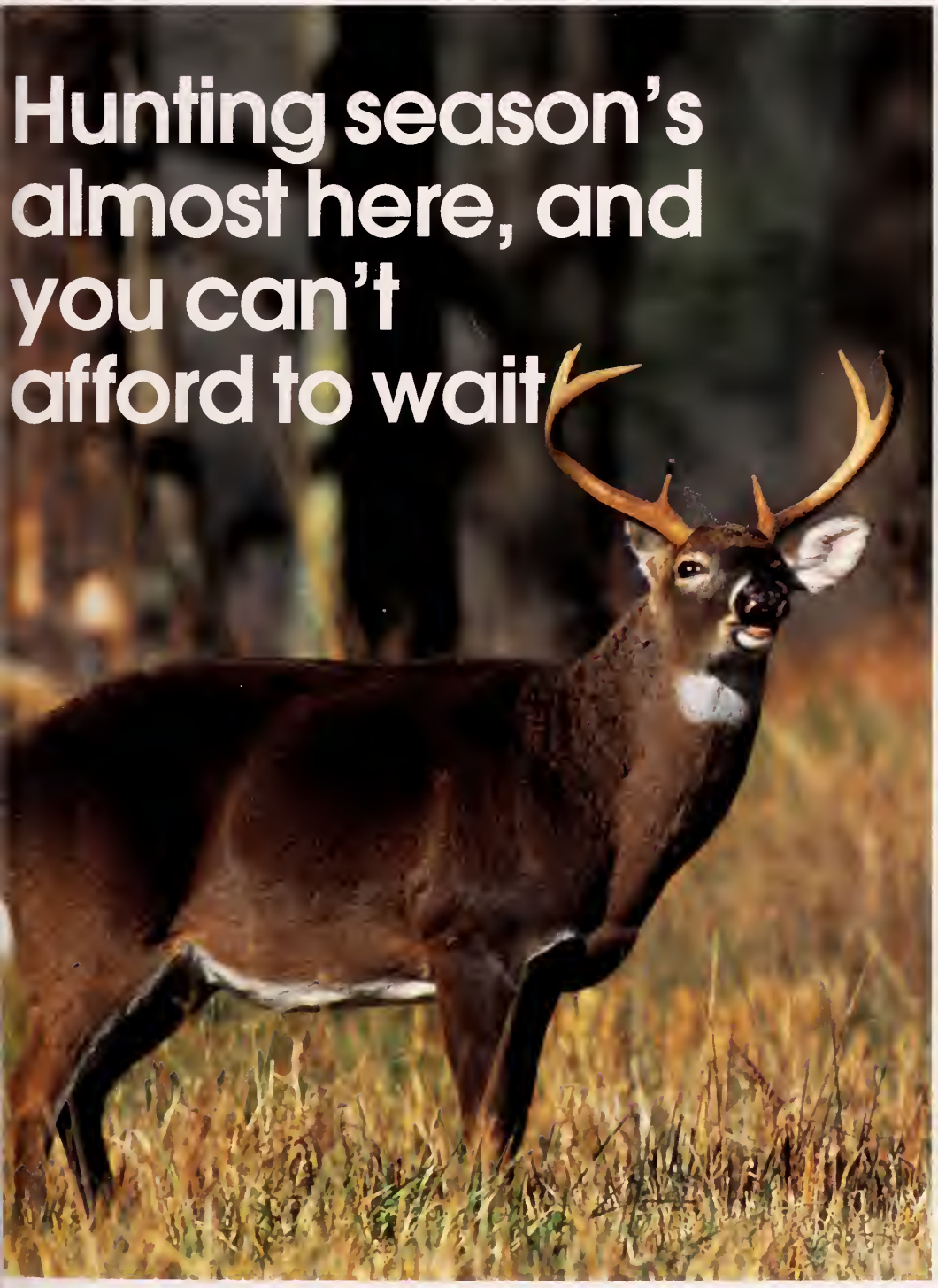
Undaunted, Catharine considered both outings a success.

At the end of day two, she replied, "I could just sit here, and watch the woods come alive every morning, and be happy, turkey or no turkey."

Though her first spring gobbler hunts didn't involve a wild turkey dinner this time, as a guest of John and "Miss Sue" Byrne, J.T.'s parents, Catharine did enjoy morel mushrooms, which graced the evening meals.

She also caught plenty of fish. While fly casting on a local native trout stream, Catharine caught and released, as she said, "a fish in every hole."

And did she hear any gobbles while trout fishing? "You can bet I was listening," she replied. □



Hunting season's almost here, and you can't afford to wait

If you want to hear from the experts, you'll want to hear the seminars presented by wildlife biologists and game wardens from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), at the Virginia Outdoor Sportsman Show. The biologists will provide a comprehensive oversight of deer management in Virginia, and the wardens will help you understand their perspective on wildlife laws.

The show is scheduled for August 9, 10 and 11, at The Showplace, 3000 Mechanicsville Turnpike, Richmond, Virginia. The VDGIF wildlife biologists are scheduled for Saturday the 10th at 1 p.m., and the wardens are on at 5. And there will be plenty to do before and in between seminars, including taking a turn at VDGIF's interactive Hunter Education video, where you can test your knowledge of safe shooting.

So get ready for another safe hunting season, and come listen to the experts.

Recipes

By Joan Cone

Smoke Fish On Your Outdoor Grill

Excellent smoked fish can be produced in (hooded or covered) electric, gas or charcoal grills. Adjust the temperature according to recipes used. If available, use an oven thermometer with a charcoal grill. The procedure is the same for all types of grills.

Wood chips from apple, oak, hickory and cherry give smoke flavor to fish. Soak one pound of hardwood chips in two quarts of water for several hours or overnight.

Thaw fish if frozen. Combine one quart cold water and 1/4 cup salt; stir until dissolved. Marinate fish in brine in refrigerator for 30 minutes.

Fat fish are best for smoking, but lean fish such as bass, trout, catfish and others can be smoked with good results if basted frequently with cooking oil during the smoking process. Baste fat fish only near the end of cooking time. Close hood on grill and open vent slightly to keep smoke and air circulating.

Plain Delicious Smoked Fish

1 to 1 ½ pounds fish fillets with skin left on
1 quart water
¼ cup salt
1 pound hickory chips
2 quarts water

Thaw fish if frozen. Combine 1 quart water and salt. Stir until salt is dissolved. Place fish in brine and let marinate in refrigerator for 30 minutes. Remove fish from brine; rinse thoroughly and dry. Soak hickory chips in 2 quarts water for several hours or overnight. Keep chips in a cool place to keep them from taking on a mildew or sour aroma. To smoke fish, use a hooded or covered charcoal, electric or gas grill. The heat must be kept low. If using charcoal, fewer briquets are necessary than for regular grilling. Cover charcoal or ceramic briquets with approximately ⅓ the wet chips. The wet chips provide low temperatures and create smoke which flavors the fish. Remaining chips are added as needed throughout the cooking process. Place the fish fillets, skin side down, on a well greased grill approximately 4 to 6 inches from smoking chips. Close hood on grill and open vent slightly to keep smoke and air circulating. Smoke fish approximately 1 hour at 150° to 175° or for 30 to 45 minutes at 200°. Baste fish with cooking oil near the end of cooking time if smoking oily fish. The fish is done when the cut surface is golden brown and when the flesh flakes easily when tested with a fork. Serves 3 to 4.

Note: If fish fillets thicker than ½ inch are used, cooking time will need to be increased. Test for doneness near end of cooking time. If lean fish is used, baste frequently with cooking oil to prevent fish from drying out.

Smoked fish can be held in the refrigerator, 35° to 40°, with no loss of quality, loosely wrapped for three days. To freeze smoked fish, wrap loosely and allow to cool in the refrigerator. Then re-wrap in moisture-vapor proof wrapping and place in freezer. To use, remove freezer paper, wrap in aluminum foil and heat for 20 to 30 minutes at 300°.

If you are on a low sodium diet, you can smoke fish in an electric smoker without soaking your fish first in a brine.

Low Sodium Smoked Fish Fillets

Place a sheet of heavy duty aluminum foil on rack in an electric smoker. Punch 6 holes in center of same and place fish on the foil. Season with lemon pepper or other seasoning, slices of lemon and paprika. Place fillets in electric smoker, using one handful of chips and smoke 2 pounds of fillets approximately 1 hour. Two 2-pound whole fish will take about 1 ½ hours. *Note:* Cooking time will vary in an electric smoker according to outdoor temperature.

Smoked Fish Rarebit

2 cups boned, flaked, smoked fish
2 tablespoons butter or margarine
2 tablespoons flour
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon dry mustard
Dash cayenne pepper
1 ½ cups milk
2 cups shredded sharp-process American cheese
1 package (10 ounces) frozen peas, cooked and drained
3 tablespoons sliced green onion
2 tablespoons chopped pimiento (optional)
6 patty shells, buttered toast points or English muffins

In a 2-quart sauce pan, melt butter; stir in flour, salt, dry mustard and cayenne pepper. Add milk; cook, stirring constantly until thick and smooth. Add cheese; stir until cheese is melted. Fold in smoked fish, peas, green onion and pimiento; heat. Serve in patty shells, or on toast points or English muffins. Makes 6 servings.

Smoked Fish Spread

1 ½ pounds smoked fish
1 ¼ cups mayonnaise or salad dressing
2 tablespoons finely chopped sweet pickle
2 tablespoons chopped parsley
1 tablespoon mustard
2 teaspoons minced onion
2 teaspoons finely chopped celery
1 clove garlic, minced
Dash Worcestershire sauce

Remove skin and bones from fish. Flake the fish well. Combine all ingredients and mix well. Chill at least one hour. Makes approximately 3 ½ cups spread. ☐

Habitat

by Nancy Hugo

Partridgeberry

This is the time of year when a woodland groundcover that has been inconspicuous most of the year begins to say "Hey, look at me!" It's partridgeberry, a diminutive evergreen with trailing stems that develops ⅓" oval berries maturing in late summer and fall. The leaves alone are handsome—shiny, dark green with a lighter mid-vein, but it's the showy little red berries that make this plant light up. "Squawberry" and "twinberry" are other common names for the plant. The name squawberry derives from the fact that many of the medicinal uses of the plant by American Indians related to the treatment of female disorders; a tea made of the leaves, for example, was used to ease the pain of childbirth and a paste made of the berries was used as a salve by nursing mothers. I don't know the origin of the name "twinberry" but assume it refers to the fact that the berries develop from "twin" flowers. Partridgeberry's flowers are always borne in pairs and a single berry develops from each pair. Next year watch for these tiny flowers which bloom between May and July, because once you've learned to appreciate them, you'll want to get down on your knees and smell them up close. You'd never know it from afar, but up close these ½" funnel-shaped flowers are almost as fragrant as gardenias. I've seen their sweet fragrance referred to as lilac-like, but to me it has a more fruity character.

Where this plant, which is native to moist woodlands from Nova Scotia to Minnesota and south to Florida, got its name "partridgeberry" is a puzzle. There are no native partridges in this country, and one might assume the name attached itself to the plant in another English-speaking country where there are partridges, but the only other species of this genus grows in Japan. What's most likely is that the name derives from the fact that grouse and quail, both of which are sometimes referred to as partridges, eat the plant's berries. Wild turkeys, other birds, and small mammals sometimes eat partridgeberries, too.

Although the name might suggest partridgeberry has significant value to wildlife, as a food, it's of relatively minor importance. It is, however, a groundcover that offers some food to wildlife and, as such, would be a great improvement over many of the unproductive groundcovers used over and over again in gardens. In shady areas, partridgeberry *(Mitchella repens)* would even make a good substitute for grass, and if that grass is maintained with heavy applications of pesticides and fertilizers, replacing it with partridgeberry would benefit wildlife by default. I know it was something of a revelation to me the day I went out to weed the partridgeberry out of the fescue under an oak tree and realized I was throwing away the wrong plant. Partridgeberry needs shade and can't take heavy foot traffic, but under my oak where it receives only occasional foot traffic, it's happier than my grass ever was.

O.C. Moore III

Hal Horwitz

With its white flowers ***(below)*** *and red berries* ***(above)*** Mitchella repens *is a common groundcover plant.*

The real impediment to large-scale use of partridgeberry in yards you want to make wildlife friendly is finding sources of the plant. Until recently, it was almost impossible to find in nurseries, because, relative to many other plants, it's hard to grow to marketable size. Several mail order nurseries that specialize in native plants now offer partridgeberry, however. One of them, We-Du Nurseries (704- 738-8300) offers small plants for about $4 each. But if you look around your woods, you may discover you already have a source of this plant. Not only is partridgeberry relatively common in moist Virginia woodlands (transplant it only with permission of the landowner), but, because birds disperse the seeds in their feces, it often pops up in shady backyards uninvited and unnoticed. Learn what to look for, and you may discover you already have a colony of partridgeberry that you can encourage to spread just by letting its roots, which form at nodes along the stem, run.

August Afield

August means the "Dog Days," hurricane season, outdoor shows, preparation for the fast-approaching hunting season, the announcement of the waterfowl seasons, submitting applications for special deer hunts at locations such as Radford Arsenal and other locations. August is tarpon on the Eastern Shore and catalpa worms on Claytor Lake. It is bream on a popper or carp on the fly. It is also the month when rural postal carriers help the Game Department count small game.

August is practicing with the bow and arrow, reloading dove shells, painting decoys for resident geese and sharpening up on the skeet or sporting clays range. It is also cruising the blue water for billfish, dolphin and tuna. August is also the month when the board of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries looks at fishing regulations.

In freshwater the fish of summer dominate this month. It's bass on topwater baits at dawn and dusk and down and dirty during the day. It is also bream in the pads and catfish at night. August is prime time on the smallmouth rivers where water is often barely cooling the rocks, but the bronzebacks and their smaller cousins, rock bass and redbreasts, attack anglers' offerings from the shade.

A big bass is always a possibility in August. Last year Briery Creek Lake yielded a 10 ½ pound lunker during this month. This is also a good time to visit the crappie at Lake Chesdin and were chicken livers fished at night are known to catch landlocked striped bass. Lake Anna offers good fishing for deep water bass as the white perch commence to form into tight schools that are not too elusive targets for anglers with small jigs and a yen for action. Jigging into schools of perch is also a possibility on Buggs Island Lake and Lake Gaston.

This is also a good month to stalk those big blue catfish at night on the James River and possibly the Rappahannock. Last August on the James River a catfish tournament produced two catches of three fish limits that exceeded 70 pounds.

Almost unnoticed is the opening of the crow hunting season this month, but many hunter's eyes are on Richmond as the board of the Game Department pieces together a waterfowl season within the federal framework.

August is a prime month for offshore fishing for billfish, dolphin, wahoo and yellowfin tuna. Towards the end of the month the billfish, mainly white marlin, are often available in fantastic numbers.

The omnipresent offshore fish of August is the amberjack. Generally, this big, hard-fighting member of the jack family doesn't rank high on anglers' preference lists, possibly because it is not considered good to eat, but they are stubborn opponents on the end of one's line. Those of us who keep an eye on the offshore fishing usually observe that when amberjack citations are up, the fishing for other species is down.

Although this has not been a good year for speckled trout, August is the beginning of the annual autumn speckled trout season. The trout, great predators of peeler blue crabs, stalk the shallow waters along the grassy banks of the bay and the grass beds in the mouths of the bayside creeks and rivers where they are caught on peeler crabs and a variety of artificial lures.

This has been a good year for croakers and August could well be the best month of that good year. From the time they appear in April croakers are feeding and putting on weight and by August they have attained the best weights of the seasons. Look for the big ones in the tidal rivers, particularly the James, York, and Rappahannock.

If August follows the pattern it could be a dry month, a month when the freshwater flows are weak and saltwaters push far inland. As the saltwaters push up the tidal rivers they bring with them such salty fish as croakers, spot and small bluefish. Blue crabs also join in the exploration of inland waters where they harass and mystify bass fishermen by clipping off bits of the plastic worm or lizard bass baits. I'm sure that the crabs are no more disappointed than the anglers when they discover that the sweet-smelling plastic isn't very tasty.

This summer is shaping up as another great one for cobia. Early August is usually quite good for these great battlers, but as the month wears on the cobia begin to show signs of restlessness. This is an excellent time to search for cobia around the buoys and other structure where well-presented artificial lures or live spot will catch them, Also, this month we should still be able to find a few black drum around the Bridge Tunnel and some red drum on the shoals at the mouth of the bay.

Although the striped bass season is closed this month in the tidal waters, some are encountered throughout the bay where they are caught and released. Studies have shown that released striped bass do not fare well when the water temperatures are high and sportsmen are urged to avoid catching them at this time of the year if possible.

August is also a great month to just be outdoors. Canoeing or tubing the rocky rivers, fishing from a pier at night, or making a summer breeze with a jet ski are all among the many things that make August a month Virginians can enjoy. Often in late August nature brings us a sample of brisk cool air for a day or two, whetting our appetites for the clear, crisp golden days to come. □

Photo TipS

By Lynda Richardson

"Ticking Away the Summer"

Camera in hand, I wandered slowly through the tall grass that lined a sandy creek glancing down to check for signs of it's inhabitants. A large raccoon had left the remains of his crayfish dinner in one watery spot while a doe and her fawn had crossed further down near a patch of nettles. Large tracks revealed several dogs had passed through the area, running up the creek bed and sliding belly down into the cool waters of a deeper section of the waterway. I could see where water droplets had been hurled from their coats, small craters dotting the sand.

While enjoying these events of the previous night, I spotted delicate black winged damsel flies playing back and forth across the creek. Their metallic turquoise bodies bounced to the rhythm of cicadas and gray tree frogs trilling overhead under the thick summer heat. A light breeze brushed the sweet smell of honeysuckle into my face and I closed my eyes to relish this favorite of scents. Though a bit steamy, the day had proved a memorable one and it was about this time I began to itch.

My legs had suddenly developed an odd creepy crawly feeling. Tiny pins pricked my skin in waves and the feeling was unbearable. I bent over, pulled up a pant leg and to my horror discovered that I was under attack. Both legs were crawling with armies of newly hatched seed ticks.

The invaders had apparently been hitching a ride long enough to begin their first strategy of attack; trench warfare. Burrowing pinpoint heads into my flesh, they gnawed and dug hoping to trench in before being discovered. Fortunately, with all my years of woodland outdoor experiences, I knew how to handle the assault. Calmly looking around, I dropped my drawers and frantically began to pick, scrape, pull, crush and fling every bug body I could get my fingernails on.

Ticks never fight fair. They are very sneaky and hide among tree leaves and grasses right where they know animals will pass. Then, as you brush against them, they grab on and immediately begin plotting which orifice they would prefer to penetrate.

Stealthfully crawling to the chosen spot, ticks know they are usually undetectable until they bite. With this logic, biting takes place when the victim is preoccupied with something very important. Ticks have been known to bite people in the middle of speeches at $250 a plate black tie fundraisers. During routine traffic checks with state troopers, ticks have been responsible for causing minor misunderstandings involving weapons. A more typical victory for a tick is when that huge gobbler you've been working for the last six hours finally comes into view.

I will say, in my only defense of the tick, that it does have a sense of humor. I have known ticks to implant themselves on the lobes of an ear only to be discovered by the person you're having lunch with, a perspective client.

To help the public in the mutual war against ticks I would like to recommend the following:

1) Whenever traveling through forest or field always remember to wear light colored long pants, a long sleeved shirt and a hat. The light color will help you spot ticks if they land on you and the long coverings will limit the access to your body. Hats will deter aerial assaults.

2) To protect your legs wear medium to thick weight socks and pull them up over your pants cuffs. If you are going into a particular sneaky tick area seal your cuffs/socks further by wrapping duct "duck" tape where the socks meet your pants. Don't skimp on tape.

3) Speaking of duct tape, keep a small roll with you at all times. Nothing is more satisfying than using it to remove ticks. On many occasions when I've discovered a mass of seed ticks migrating up my pants leg, I've pulled out the trusty duct tape, ripped off a piece and pressed it over the whole cloud of marching marauders. Mashing the tape to press it onto as many as possible, I would then slowly, pull the tape back revealing little brown bodies frantically grasping for traction with tiny tick feet. Satisfaction guaranteed!

4) If a tick bites you, remove it with tweezers and apply hydrogen peroxide to the bite. Be sure to watch the bite area for thirty days for any indication of a bull's-eye shaped rash (a red ring with a white center) as well as flu-like symptoms in the "bitee." Ticks carry Lymes Disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Colorado Tick Fever and several forms of encephalitis so always be on the alert for these potential health hazards.

5) Deet is a chemical in many insect repellents which has been known to repel ticks. If you must use a chemical repellent, for best results select one which has a high concentration of deet. As with all chemicals be careful and be sure to follow the manufacturers directions before use.

6) Lastly, start a tradition. We call these "tick checks." Every evening after a family jaunt we check our dogs for ticks. Then we make sure all family members are checked.

The next time you take a photographic trip in the fields and forests of the Commonwealth, be sure to remember the tick. With careful planning, you can usually have an enjoyable tick free time. Excuse me while I check an itch behind my knee. □

RISE TO THE OCCASION.

Reel in a brook trout plate

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All plates are available from the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles. Choose a regular plate or a personalized plate (2 to 6 letters or numbers). Fill out the application on the gray card inside this magazine to order your Wildlife Conservationist plate. Today is a perfect day to rise to the occasion!